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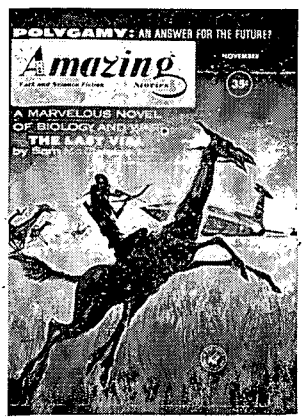

when a mysterious disease that appeared to be man-made enveloped the globe. It was a disease that caused sterility in every male it touched — and no one knew from where it came! It remained for a courageous doctor and the girl who loved him, to search out the origin of the most dangerous virus ever to stalk the earth. You'll enjoy reading the LAST VIAL—part one of a three-part serial by Sam McClatchie, M.D.—appearing in November AMAZING.

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fantastic

Stories of Imagination

NOVEMBER 1960

Volume 9 Number 11

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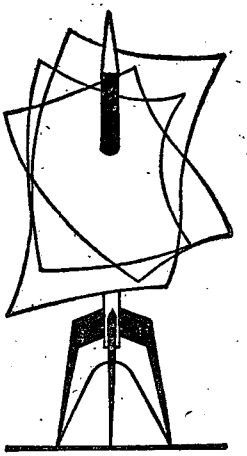

EDITORIAL

FRITZ LEIBER'S cover story in this issue should contain enough fantasy to satisfy even the most demanding of our fantasy-conscious readers. But one of the most interesting things about it, to our mind, is the fact that much of what Leiber treats as fantasy—and *is*, for all practical purposes, fantasy—rests on hard scientific fact.

Perhaps the core of Leiber's story rests on the tektite—the glass-like fragments found in many areas of the earth which have for scores of years puzzled scientists. In Africa, tribesmen say they fell from the moon. Science pooh-poohs this. Until quite recently, the only accepted theory for tektites was that they are splashes of earth rock, melted and tossed skyward when large meteorites hit the planet.

But in the past several months reputable men of science have put forth another theory: to wit, that tektites *are* bits of the moon's surface, exploded beyond the moon's gravity by meteorite-impact. According to this theory chunks of moon are orbiting around earth, gradually dripping drops of molten material as they dip into the atmosphere and heat up. The molten drops fall, hardening en route into the glass-surfaced, saucer-shaped tektites.

One of the leading proponents of this theory is Dr. John O'Keefe of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. He has made the following points in support of the "moon fragment" hypothesis:

1—Tektites are found in "strewn fields" that may cover nearly an entire nation such as Australia. They bear little relation to local rock strata, yet are strikingly uniform in their own composition.

2—The moon itself is probably streaked with tektites. The mysterious "rays" which radiate for hundreds of miles from many of the craters are visible only under vertical lighting. This leads O'Keefe to think the "rays" are conglomerations of tektites, whose light-reflecting properties function only under just such conditions.

3—The water content of tektites is much lower than that of sedimentary earth rocks.

4—Bubbles found in some tektites contained a near-vacuum, indicating to O'Keefe that they were formed in space.

Thus—it may not be so fantastic if a large chunk of moon should start falling towards you tonight.—NL

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DEADLY

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

ALMOST a quarter of a million miles above the earth, the moon rode east in her orbit around the larger sphere at the cosmically gentle speed of two-thirds of a mile a second, though to those on the eastward spinning planet below, completing 27 turns for the moon's one, she seemed to move west each night with the stars.

A globe of almost airless, sun-blanched rock two thousand miles wide, Luna hung now beside the earth but moving out beyond her, away from the sun. The only face of her that earthlings ever saw was now half in the full glare of raw sunlight, half in darkness. It was the night of the half moon, or first quarter as it is commonly called.

But on this night of the half moon, Luna at last had two

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The girl had nightmares when the moon was above the horizon. But Dr. Snowden was not sure something infinitely more evil than a nightmare was at work in the girl's mind.

MOON

By FRITZ LEIBER

moons of her own, though they were as invisible to earthside viewers as the two tiny moons of Mars. Free-falling around her at almost a mile a second in tight orbits a few score miles above her cratered surface with its "seas" (*mares*) of darker rock, were two small manned ships, one of the American Space Force, one of the Russian Space Force. Making a swift circuit of the moon every two hours, the pilots of these ships were each rushing through independent surveys of the moon's treacherous pumice-powdered surface, in preparation for actual landings of larger exploration ships in the near future.

So more people than ordinarily were looking up at the moon from earth's evening side. But most of them were looking up

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rather more in fear than wonder. The past decade had been one of increasingly angry bickering between the leaders of the two great nations. The long-dreaded Third World War seemed very close and the neck-and-neck race to establish the first military base on the moon seemed only one more move bringing it closer.

Nor had the war-heavy atmosphere been improved by the recent suggestion, made almost simultaneously by a Russian scientist and an American military expert, that the moon would be an ideal spot for the testing—particularly in deep underground bursts—of atomic bombs, a research activity theoretically banned on earth itself.

At the moment the Pacific Coast of America was moving into earth's shadow under the half moon. The towering evergreen forest on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains was dipping and darkening into night.

On a lonely hilltop that lifted out of the forest toward the center of the state of Washington, not far east of Puget Sound, two men and a girl were tensely watching the moon "rise"—Luna was already quite high in the southern sky—over the peaked roof of a white-walled Cape Cod style home.

The younger man could hardly have been more than a few years older than the girl—in his mid-twenties at most—yet he gave the impression of a matured thoughtfulness and poise. He was dressed for the city with the conservative elegance of a successful professional man.

The older man looked about fifty, though his mustache and eyebrows were still dark and his whole face strongly virile with its deep asymmetric vertical furrows between the brows. His rough sports clothes suited him.

He had an arm clasped around the shoulders of the girl, who likewise was dressed for the country. Her face was beautiful, but now although the evening was chilly, it was beaded with perspiration and it showed the taut, barely controlled terror of a woman who forces herself to watch an excruciating or deadly sight.

"Go on, Janet," the older man prompted harshly. "What does the moon make you think of?"

"A spider," the girl answered instantly. "A bloated white spider hanging just over my head in an invisible web. You see, I have a horror of spiders too, doctor." The last remark she shot as an explanation to the younger man. "Or a revolver! Yes, that's it!—a nickle-plated revolver with mother-of-pearl grips pointed at my chest—pointed at all of us!—by a drooling, giggling old mad-

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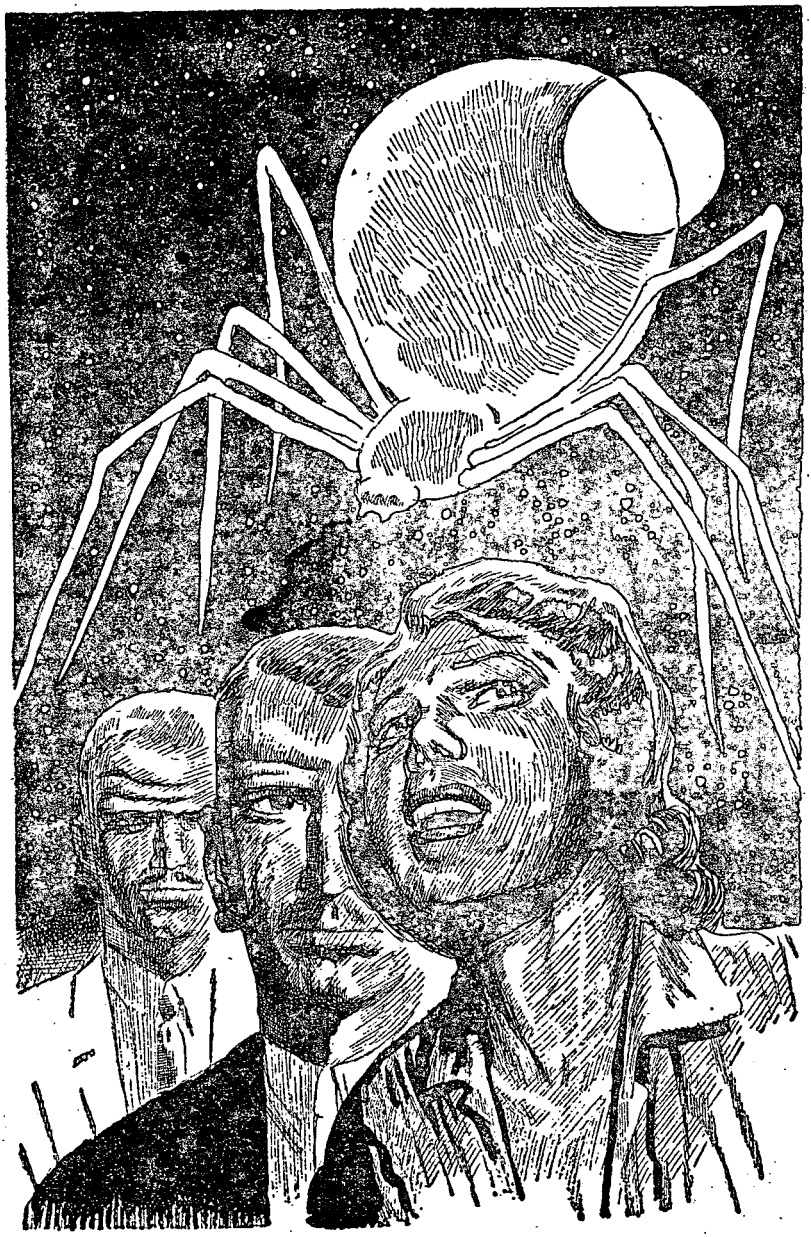

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woman whose face is white with powder and whose cheeks have circles of violet rouge and whose yellowed lace dress—"

"I think that's enough demonstration, Professor McNellis," the younger man interrupted. "Now if we could go inside with your daughter—"

"No! I first want to prove to you, Dr. Snowden, that it's only the nightmares that are any real trouble to Janet, that this moon-fear hasn't in any way seriously cracked her waking nerves."

"No, and we don't want it to, either," the younger man retorted quietly.

"Go on, Janet," the older man repeated, ignoring the implied criticism. "What else do you see in the moon?"

"A man, a rabbit, a clown, a witch, a bat, a beautiful lady," the girl answered in rapid singsong. She seemed to have lost some of her terror, or at least some of her submissiveness, during the interchange between the two men. She chuckled uneasily and said, "Dad, anyone would think *you* were the psychiatrist, the way you're using the moon for a Rorschach test!" Then her voice went grave with insight. "The moon *is* the original Rorschach inkblot, you know. The *mares* are the faded ink. For thousands of years it's been hanging up there identically the same and people have been seeing things in it. It's the only solid thing you can look at in the heavens that has any shape or parts."

The older man's arm dropped away from the girl a little. "That's quite true," he said in an odd voice. "Yet I never thought of it just that way. In a lifetime of astronomical work I never had just that thought."

The younger man moved in, put his own arm around the girl's shoulders and turned her away from the moon. The older man started to oppose him, then gave way.

"And now, Miss McNellis, since you've made an original contribution to the science of astronomy," the younger man said lightly, "I think that will be enough lunar observation for tonight."

"You're the doctor," the girl told him, managing a little smile. "The Moon Doctor."

"That title's a gross exaggeration, Janet, hung on me by one silly newspaper story," he assured her, smiling back. "Actually I wouldn't go near the place. I'm afraid of space."

"Just the same, Dad got you because you're the Moon Doctor."

"He knows a million times more about the moon than I do. And I'm sure he also knows that it's perfectly normal for a girl whose boyfriend is orbiting

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around the moon to feel frightened on his account and to view the place he's exploring—or surveying—as an almost supernatural enemy."

"Janet's fear of the moon goes back a lot further than her engagement to Tom Kimbro," the older man put in argumentively.

"Yes, Dad, but I *am* frightened on Tom's account."

"You shouldn't be. Dr. Snowden, I've pointed out to Janet that she's no worse off than a girl engaged to one of the early polar explorers. Better, because polar explorers were away for years."

"Yes, Dad, but their girlfriend couldn't go out in the yard and see Antarctica or the northern icecap hanging in the sky and know that *he* was up there, invisible, but moving across it." The edge-of-hysteria note had returned to her voice and she started slowly to turn around. "I think the moon looks as if it were made of ice," she said with eerie faintness. "Dirty ice with lots of bubbles in it."

"Janet, that's a crackpot theory!" her father said angrily. "How you could even start looking at those *Welt-Eis-Lehre* pamphlets when your father's a legitimate astronomer—"

"It's getting cold out here. We can continue inside," Dr. Andreas Snowden said firmly. This time Professor McNellis did not protest.

The living room was quite livable in spite of the way it was crammed with books and glass-fronted shelves of small meteorites and other items of astronomical interest. After they had settled themselves and Prof. McNellis had poured coffee at Dr. Snowden's suggestion, the latter fixed the professor's daughter with a friendly grin for a few moments and then said, "And now I want to hear all about it, Janet. Ordinarily I'd talk to you alone, and tomorrow I will, but this way seems comfortable now. Let's see, your mother died when you were a little girl and so you've spent your life with your father, who is a great student of the moon, although his specialty is meteoritics—and just recently you've become engaged to Lieutenant Commander Tom Kimbro, pilot and crew of America's first circumlunar survey ship and infinitely more the Moon Man than I'm the Moon Doctor."

"I've known Tom for years, though," the girl added, smilingly at ease herself now that there was a roof overhead. "Dad's always been mixed up in the Moon Project."

"Yes. Now tell me about this moon-horror of yours. And please, Prof. McNellis, no professional interruptions no matter what comes up, even Cosmic Ice Theory."

He said it jokingly, but it

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sounded like a command just the same. The professor, less tense now that he was playing host, took it with good grace.

His daughter glanced gratefully at the young doctor, then grew thoughtful. "The nightmares are the worst part," she said after a bit. "Especially after they got so bad two months ago. I'm afraid of going crazy while I'm having them. In fact, I think I do go crazy and stay that way for ten minutes or so after I wake up. That was what happened two months ago when I reared out of bed and got Dad's revolver and shot off all the bullets in it through the bedroom window straight at the moon. I knew at the time that it was some sort of gesture I was making—I knew I couldn't hit the moon, or at least I was pretty sure I couldn't—but at the same time I knew it was something I had to do to save my sanity. The only other thing I could have done would have been to dive in our bomb shelter and never come out. You know, it was like when something's broken your nerve and made you cower, and if you don't strike out right away, no matter how convulsively . . ."

"I understand," the doctor said soberly. There was approval in his voice. "Janet, what happens in these dreams?"

"Nightmares, you mean. Nightmare, really, for it's always about the same. It repeats." Janet closed her eyes. "Well, I'm standing outside and it's night and then the moon comes across the sky very fast, only it's much bigger and brighter. Sometimes it almost seems to brush the trees. And I squinch down as if it were a big silver express train come out of nowhere behind me and I'm terribly frightened. It plunges out of sight and I think I'm safe, but then it comes roaring up over the opposite horizon, even lower this time. There's a hot smell as if the air were being burnt by friction. This keeps on over and over again, faster and faster, though each time I think it's the last. I begin to feel like Poe's man in 'The Pit and the Pendulum,' tied flat on the floor and looking up at the gleaming pendulum that keeps coming closer each whistling stroke until the knife-edge is about to slice him in two.

"But finally I can't help myself, I get curious. I know it's positively the worst thing I can do, that there's some dreadful law against it, that I'm defying some fantastically powerful authority, but just the same I reach up—don't ask me how I manage when the moon's going so fast, I don't know, and don't ask me how I reach so far when it's still in the treetops—sometimes it seems to press its cratered face down into the yard

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and sometimes I grow an arm long as the magic beanstalk—but anyway I reach up, knowing I shouldn't, and I touch the moon!"

"How does the moon feel to your fingers when you touch it?" Dr. Snowden asked.

"Hairy, like a big spider," Janet answered rapidly. Then she opened her eyes wonderingly. "I never remembered *that* before. The moon is rock. Why did I say it, doctor?"

"I don't know. Forget it." Then, "What happens next?" he asked matter-of-factly.

Janet hugged her elbows and held her knees tight together. "The moon breaks up," she whispered. "It cracks all over like a white plate. For a moment the fragments churn around, then they all come hammering down at me. But in the instant before I'm destroyed and the world with me, while the fragments are still streaking down at me like bullets or an avalanche of rocks or a jack-in-the-box upside down, growing mountain-size in a moment—in that instant I feel this dreadful guilt and I know I'm responsible for it all because I touched the moon. That's when I go crazy." She let out a breath.

Dr. Snowden smiled. "You know, Janet, I can't help thinking how two or three thousand years ago your dream would have been regarded as a clear warning from the gods not to land on the moon—plus a prevision of the dreadful things that would happen to us if we kept on meddling sacrilegiously with the heavenly bodies. *No,* Prof. McNellis, I don't mean a word of that seriously," he added quickly as he noted that the astronomer's expression had become aggressively disapproving. "It's just that I make it a habit at a session like this of saying whatever comes into my head. I believe in bringing even superstitious thoughts out and looking at them. By the way, I'd say Janet's dream shows some elements of Cosmic Ice Theory, wouldn't you? See, I break my own rules as soon as I make them."

"If you dignify it with the name Theory," the professor replied sardonically. "A Viennese engineer named Hoerbiger started the whole *Welt-Eis-Lehre* business—a man with no astronomical training. His weird and wonderful notion was that the moon is made of ice and mud, that it came spiraling in from the infinite and will soon get so close to earth that it will cause floods and earthquakes and then break up, showering us with a fiery frigid hail. What's more according to Hoerbiger earth has had six previous moons, which all broke up the same way. This

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one we've got now is the seventh. Incidentally, the break-up of the sixth moon is supposed to have accounted for all legends of universal floods, fire-breathing dragons, falling towers of Babel, the Twilight of the Gods, and what have you.

"It's all nothing new, by the way. In the last century Ignatius Donnelly, who even got to be a member of Congress, wrote it all up in his book *Ragnarok*, except he used comets instead of moons —in those days they thought of comets as more massive. And now Velikovsky's done it again —gone over Hoerbiger once lightly, with comets. Took in some allegedly smart people, too.

"Hoerbiger developed *one* great set of followers at any rate —the Nazis. Most of them were suckers for pseudo-science. Cosmic Ice suited the Nordic superman perfectly.

"Of course, Janet knows all about this—she's read the junk, haven't you, dear?"

The doctor cocked his head and asked quickly, "Am I mistaken, Prof. McNellis, or isn't there nevertheless some shadow of a real scientific theory behind this notion of moons breaking up?"

"Oh yes. If a satellite with a plastic core gets close enough to its mother planet, the tidal action of the latter tears it apart. That's what's supposed to have produced the rings of Saturn—the break-up of a moon of Saturn that got too close. The crucial distance is called Roche's limit. In the case of earth it's only six thousand miles above the ground —Luna would have to be that close, even if she had the right kind of core, which she hasn't. It *has* been suggested—by George Gamow—that if everything worked out just right this situation might actually come about—in one hundred billion years!" The professor chuckled. "You can see that none of this stuff applies to our present situation at all."

"Still, it's interesting." The doctor looked back from father to daughter and asked casually, "Janet, do you believe in this *Welt-Eis-Lehre*?"

She shook her head while her father snorted. "But it's interesting," she added with a nervous, almost impish smile.

"I agree," Dr. Snowden said, nodding. "You know, Hans Schindler Bellamy, Hoerbiger's British disciple, had a very vivid childhood dream almost exactly like yours, that later helped convert him to Hoerbiger."

"Then you already knew what I was telling you about the Cosmic Ice farrago?" Prof. McNellis said accusingly.

"Only a bit here and there," the doctor assured him. "One or two of my patients were con-

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verts." He did not pursue the point. "Janet," he said, "I gather your own moon dreams go back to childhood, but they weren't so frightening then?"

"That's right. Except for one time when Dad took me on an ocean cruise just after mother died. I'd see the moonlight dancing on the water. The dreams were very bad then."

Prof. McNellis nodded. "We went to the Caribbean. You were just seven. Almost every night you'd wake up whimpering and blurry-eyed. Naturally, Dr. Snowden, I assumed Janet was reacting to her mother's death."

"Of course. Tell me, Janet, where is the real moon when you have these dreams? I mean, do they tend to cluster around the time of the full moon?"

The girl bobbed her head vigorously. "Once—just once—I remember having the nightmare in the daytime and when I woke up I saw the moon out of the window, faint silver in the pale blue afternoon sky."

Again Prof. McNellis nodded confirmation and said, "For years I've kept a record of Janet's dreams. In every instance the moon was above the horizon when the dream occurred. There were none during the dark of the moon—none of the hundred and seventeen Janet reported to me, at any rate."

The doctor frowned quizzically. "That's a rather astonishing circumstance, don't you think? To what do you attribute it?"

The professor shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe moonlight is the stimulus that triggers the dream, or was to start with."

"Yes," Janet said rather solemnly. "Doctor, isn't it an old theory that the moon causes mental upsets? You know, Luna and lunacy. And isn't there supposed to be something very special about moonlight?—something affecting growth and women's monthly cycles and the electrical pressures in the blood and the brain?"

"Don't get off on that track, Janet," her father said sharply. "Another real possibility, Dr. Snowden, is that Janet has a moon-clock in her brain and that her subconscious only sends the dream when the moon is topside. I'm just telling you the facts."

Janet raised her hand. "I just remembered," she said excitedly, "that the exact position of the moon in the sky had a lot to do with my Caribbean dreams being so bad. Dr. Snowden," she continued anxiously, "you know that up north here the moon is never exactly overhead, that even when it's at its highest in the sky it's still south of the zenith?"

"Yes, I know that much," he grinned.

"Well, when we sailed to the

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Caribbean I remember Dad explaining to me that now we were in the Tropic Zone the moon could be directly overhead. In fact, on one night of the cruise it *was* directly overhead." She shivered.

"I think I remember telling you about that," her father said, "but I don't recall it making any impression on you at the time. At least you didn't say anything to me."

"I know. I was afraid you'd be angry."

"But why? And why should the moon being in the zenith frighten you especially?"

"Yes, Janet, why?" Dr. Snowden echoed.

She looked back and forth between the two men. "Don't you see? If the moon were straight overhead, it could fall straight down on me. Anywhere else, it might miss me. It's the difference between being in the mouth of a tunnel that may collapse at any minute and being *in* the tunnel."

This time it was the professor who chuckled. "Janet," he said, "you certainly did take this thing seriously when you were a tyke."

"I still take it seriously," she flared at him. "My feelings take it seriously. What holds the moon up? A lot of scientific laws! What if the laws should be repealed, or broken?"

"Oh Janet," was all her father could say, still chuckling, while Dr. Snowden commented, "Your feelings take it seriously—that's a nice phrase, Janet. But your mind doesn't take it seriously, does it?"

"I guess not," she admitted unwillingly.

"For instance," he pressed, "I don't know if it's possible, but suppose there should be a volcanic eruption on the moon, you know that the chunks of rock thrown up would fall back to the moon, don't you? That they couldn't hit the earth? Even if they were shot out toward the earth?"

"I suppose you're right," she agreed after a moment.

"No you're not, Dr. Snowden —not exactly," Prof. McNellis interjected, getting up. He was grinning with friendly maliciousness. "You say you're a man who believes in speaking his thoughts and settling for nothing less than reality. Good! Those are my own sentiments." He stopped in front of one of the glass-fronted cases. "Come over here, I've got something to show you. You too, Janet—I never told you about these. After your nightmares started, I always believed in playing down the moon to you, until Dr. Snowden convinced me of the superior virtue of always speaking all the truth."

"I didn't exactly say—" Dr. Snowden began and cut himself

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short. He went over to the case. Janet McNellis stopped just behind him.

Prof. McNellis indicated some specimens of what looked like blackish glass neatly arranged on white cardboard. Most of them seemed to be fragments of small domed disks, but a few were almost perfect buttons a half inch to an inch across.

Prof. McNellis cleared his throat. "Meteorites of this sort are called tektites," he explained. "They are found only in the Tropic Zone or near it—in other words, under the moon. The theory is that when large meteorites hit the moon, some fragments of the moon's siliceous—glassy or sandy—surface are dashed upward at speeds greater than the moon's low escape velocity of a mile and a half a second. Some of these fragments are captured by earth's gravitational field. During their fall to earth they are melted by the heat of friction with the air and take their characteristic button shape. So right here, in all likelihood, you are looking at bits of actual moon-rock, tiny fragments of—*Janet, what is it?*"

Dr. Snowden looked around. Janet was leaning tautly forward, her gaze hypnotically fixed on the tektites. She was trembling visibly. ". . . like spiders," he heard her say faintly.

Suddenly her face convulsed into a mask halfway between panic and rage. She lifted her fists above her head and lunged at the glass. Dr. Snowden grabbed her around the waist, using his other arm to block her descending fists, and in spite of her struggles wrenched her around so that she wasn't looking at the case. She continued to struggle and he could feel her still shivering too.

The professor hesitated, then went out in the hall and called, "Mrs. Pulaski!"

The girl stopped struggling but the doctor didn't release her. "Janet," he whispered sharply, "what do *you* believe causes your dreams?"

"You'll think I'm crazy," she whispered back.

His arms hugged her a little more tightly. "Everyone's crazy," he assured her with great conviction.

"I think my dreams are warnings," she whispered. *"I think they're somehow broadcast to my mind from a station on the moon."*

"Thank you, Janet," the doctor said, releasing her.

Prof. McNellis returned with a stout motherly woman. Janet went to her. " 'Scuse me, everybody, I was goofy," she said. "G'night, Dad, doctor."

When the two women were gone the two men looked at each

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other. The doctor lifted his empty coffee cup. As the professor poured for both of them, he said ruefully, "I guess I was the goofy one, shocking Janet that way."

"It's almost impossible to tell in advance how something like that will work out," the doctor consoled him. "Though I'll admit I was startled by those tektites myself. I'd never heard of the things."

The professor frowned. "There are a lot of things about the moon that most people don't know. But what do you think about Janet?"

"It's too soon to say. Except that she seems remarkably stable, both mentally and emotionally, for whatever it is she's going through."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"You mustn't worry about her cracking up, professor, but I also advise you not to put her in any more test situations."

"I won't!—I think I've learned my lesson." The professor's tone grew confidential. "Dr. Snowden, I've often wondered if some childhood trauma mayn't have been the cause of Janet's moon-dread. Perhaps she believed that my interest in astronomy—to a child, the moon—was somehow responsible for her mother's death."

"Could be," the doctor nodded thoughtfully. "But I have a hunch that the real cause of Janet's dreams has nothing to do with psychoanalysis or *Welt-Eis Lehre* or her anxiety about Tom Kimbro."

The professor looked up. "What else then?" he asked sharply.

The doctor shrugged. "Again it's too early to say."

The professor studied him. "Tell me," he said, "why are you called the Moon Doctor? The Moon Project recommended you—I didn't investigate any further."

"I had luck treating a couple of Project executives who had nervous breakdowns—but that isn't the main reason." The doctor held out his cup for more coffee. After taking a swallow, he settled back. "About two years ago," he began, "I had a run of private patients who had a horror of the moon mixed up with their other troubles. It seemed too much of a coincidence, so I sent out feelers and inquiries to other psychiatrists, lay analysts, mental hospitals, psycho wards, and so on. The answers came in fast!—evidently there were dozens of doctors as puzzled as I. It turned out that there were literally thousands of cases of mental aberration characterized by moon-dread, hundreds of them involving dreams very similar to

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Janet's about the moon breaking up—exploding, suffering giant volcanic eruptions, colliding with a comet or with earth itself, cracking under tidal strain, and so on."

The professor shook his head wonderingly. "I knew Project Moon had touched off a bit of a panic reaction, but I never dreamed it went that deep."

The doctor said, "In hundreds of cases—again like Janet's—there was a history of mild moon-fears going back to childhood."

"Hmm—sounds like the onset of the mass neurosis, or whatever you'd call it, coincided with the beginnings of high rocketry and space travel."

"Apparently. But then how do you explain this? For about four thousand dreams of moon breakup I got dates—day, hour, approximate minute. In ninety seven percent of those instances the moon was above the horizon when the dream occurred. I've become convinced that some straight-line influence traveling from the moon to the dreamer is at work—something that, like short radio waves, can be blocked off by the curve and mass of the earth."

"Moonlight?" the professor suggested quickly.

"No. These dreams occur just as often when the local sky is heavily clouded as when it's clear. I don't think light or any other part of the electromagnetic spectrum is responsible. I think it's an entirely different order of waves."

The professor frowned. "Surely you're not suggesting something like thought-waves? You know, doctor, even if there is such a thing as telepathy or extrasensory perception, the chances are it takes place instantaneously, altogether outside the world of space and time. The notion of thought-waves similar to those of light and sound is primitive."

"I don't know," the doctor said. "Galileo thought that *light* moved instantaneously too, but it turned out that it was just too fast for him to measure. The same might be true of thought-waves—that they go so much faster than light that they *seem* to move instantaneously. But only seem—another century may refine techniques for measuring their speed."

"But Einstein—" The professor shrugged. "In any case the notion of telepathy is completely hypothetical."

"I don't know," the doctor repeated. "While you were calling the nurse, Janet quieted and I took the opportunity to ask her what she thought was causing her dreams. She said, *'I think my dreams are broadcast to my mind from a station on the moon.'*

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Prof. McNellis, that is by no means the first time a patient with moon-horror has made that suggestion to me."

The professor bowed his head, massaging his brow as if it were beginning to ache. "I guess I don't know either," he muttered.

The doctor's eyes brightened. "But perhaps you do," he said softly. He leaned forward. "Prof. McNellis," he continued, "what is it that's really happening on the moon? What is it that you Project people have been observing on the moon's surface that you won't reveal to outsiders, not even to me? What is it that Tom Kimbro may be glimpsing now?"

The professor didn't look up, but his hand stopped massaging his forehead.

"Prof. McNellis, I *know* you've been observing something strange on the moon. I got unmistakable hints of it from one of my Project patients, but even in his condition he let himself be gagged by security regulations. What is it? You don't suppose I came way out here *only* to treat Janet, do you?"

For several seconds neither man moved or spoke. It was a contest of wills. Then the professor looked up shiftily.

"For centuries some astronomers, usually the less dependable ones, have been observing all sorts of 'strange' things on the moon," he began evasively. "One hundred and fifty years ago Gruithuisen reported seeing a fortress near the crater Schroeter. One hundred years ago Zentmayer saw mountain-size objects marching or moving across the moon during an eclipse. Bright spots have been seen, black spots, spots like giant bats —Charles Fort's books of newspaper-science are crammed with examples! Really, Dr. Snowden, strange things seen on the moon are an old, many-times-exploded story." His voice had grown loud and assertive, but he did not meet the doctor's eyes.

"Prof. McNellis, I'm not interested in past observations of strange appearances on the moon," the doctor pressed on insistently. "What I want to know is what's being observed on the moon right now. It's my guess that it has nothing to do with Russian activities—I've heard through European colleagues that there's been a sizable outbreak of some kind of moon-psychosis, plus moon-dreams, in the Soviet Union too—so you don't have *that* reason for making security regulations sacrosanct. Please tell me, Prof. McNellis—I need the information if I'm to treat Janet successfully."

The professor twisted in his chair, finally said miserably, "It's been made top secret.

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They're mortally afraid of setting off a major panic, or having the whole Project canceled."

"Prof. McNellis, a panic *is* being set off and maybe the Project *should* be canceled, but that's nothing to me. My interest is solely professional—my own profession."

"Even when you were recommended to me as a psychiatrist, I was warned against telling you about the observations. And if Janet ever heard a word of them, she *would* go mad."

"Prof. McNellis, I'm a grown man, I'm reasonably responsible. I may need that information to save your daughter's sanity."

The professor looked up hollow-eyed, at last meeting the doctor's gaze. "I'll chance it," he said. "Two months ago our moon telescope in the 24-hour-satellite, where the seeing isn't blurred by atmosphere, began to observe activity of an unknown nature in four separate areas of the moon: near Mare Nectaris, in Mare Foecunditatis, north of Mare Crisium, and in the moon's very center by Sinus Medii. It was impossible to determine the nature of the activity. At first we thought it was the Russians secretly got there ahead of us, but Space Intelligence disposed of that possibility. The observations themselves amounted simply to a limited and variable darkening in the four areas—shadows, you might say, though one viewer described what he saw as 'towers, some moving.'

"Then two days ago the survey ship went into orbit—purposely an orbit that would take it over Nectaris and Foecunditatis. On his first pass Tom Kimbro reported glimpsing at both sites—here I quote him verbatim—*spiderlike or skeletal machines, towering thin creatures not men, and evidence of deep shafts being dug.*"

The professor jerked to his feet. "That's all," he said with a rapid shrug. "Since that first report, the Project's cut me off from information too. Whatever else Tom's seen—either confirming or negating those first glimpses—and whatever's happened to him, I haven't been told."

The hall door opened. "Prof. McNellis," Mrs. Pulaski said, "isn't Janet here? She said she wanted to speak to you, but the outside door's open."

The professor looked guilt-struck at the doctor. "Do you suppose she was listening from the hall? That she heard me?" The doctor was already moving past Mrs. Pulaski.

He spotted Janet at once. Her quilted silk dressing gown stood out like white paint. She was standing in the center of the lawn, looking up over the roof.

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Motioning Mrs. Pulaski back and gripping the professor's arm for silence, he moved out beside the girl.

She did not seem to notice their approach. Her lips were working a little. Her thumbs kept lightly rubbing her fingertips. Her gaze, wide-eyed, staring, was fixed on the moon.

The doctor knew that his first concern should be for his patient, but now he realized that, even before that, he too must look at the moon.

Half black and merged with space, half faintly mottled white, Luna hung starkly, her glow blanking out all but the most brilliant nearby stars. She looked smaller to the doctor than he'd been thinking of her. He realized, with irrelevant guilt, that although he'd been thinking a lot about the moon in the past two years, he hadn't bothered to look at her often and certainly hadn't studied her.

"The four sites?" he heard himself ask softly.

"Three of them are near the curving outer edge of the illuminated half," the professor answered as quietly. "The fourth is right in the middle of the shadow line."

Janet did not appear to hear them. Then, with no more warning than a gasp of indrawn breath, she screamed.

The doctor shot his arm around her shoulders, but he did not take his gaze off the moon.

Two seconds passed. Perhaps three. The moon did not change.

Then, by the curving edge, he thought he saw three tiny smudges. He asked himself what they could be at a quarter of a million miles. Giant cracks many miles across? Huge sections lifting? He blinked his eyes to clear them.

Then he was looking at the violet stars. There were four of them, brighter than Venus, although three were in the illuminated half disk at the same spots where he'd seen the smudges. The fourth, brightest of all, was dead center, bisecting the straight boundary between the bright and dark halves of the disk.

He kept looking—it would have been completely beyond his power not to—but the psychiatrist-section of his mind, operating independently, made him say loudly, "I'm seeing it too, Janet! We're all seeing it. It's real!" He said that more than once, gripping her shoulders tightly each time he spoke.

He heard Prof. McNellis croak, "Ten seconds," and realized he must mean the time since the smudges appeared.

The violet stars were growing less glitteringly bright and at the same time they were expanding. They became violet balls or

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round spots, still brighter than the moon, but paling, as big at the moment as pingpong balls if you thought of the moon as a basketball, but they were growing.

"Explosion fronts," the professor whispered, continuing at intervals to croak the time.

Two of the spots, near the edge, overlapped without losing their perfect circularity. The central spot was still brightest, especially where it expanded into the dark half. The spots were big as tennis balls now, big as baseballs.

"Atomic charges. Have to be. Huge beyond imagining. Set *hundreds* of miles deep." The professor was still speaking in a whisper.

The doctor found he was hunching his shoulders in expectation of a shattering blast, then remembered there was no air to carry sound from the moon. Some day he must ask the professor how long it would take sound to get from the moon to the earth if there *were* air to carry it. He glanced at Janet and at the same moment she looked around at him questioningly. He simply nodded once, then they both looked up again.

The four spots all overlapped now, each grown to half the moon's diameter, and they were getting hard to see against the bright half—just a thin violet wash edged with deeper violet. Soon they were indistinguishable except for the one spreading from the moon's center across the dark side. For an eerie moment it outlined the dark edge of the moon with a violet semicircle, then vanished too.

"One minute," croaked the professor. "Blast-front speed 17 miles a second."

Where the first smudges and violet stars had been were now four dark marks, almost black. The central one was hardest to see—a jag in the shadow line. They were just large enough to show irregular edges to keen eyes.

"Blast holes. One hundred, two hundred miles across. As deep, probably deeper." The professor maintained his commentary.

Then they saw the chunks.

The ones blasted from the Crisium and Foecunditatis holes were already clear of the side of the moon and gleaming with reflected sunlight themselves. Three were large enough to show their jagged shape.

"The biggest. One twentieth moon diameter by eye. One hundred miles across. Big as the asteroid Juno. New Hampshire cubed."

It almost seemed possible to see the movement of the chunks. The doctor finally decided he

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couldn't quite. It was like trying to see the movement of the minute hand of a watch. Yet every time he blinked and looked back, they seemed to have fanned out a little farther.

"Four minutes."

It became clear that the chunks were moving at different apparent speeds. The doctor decided it might be because they had been thrown up at different angles. He wondered why he so wanted to keep watching them—perhaps so as not to have to think about them? He glanced at Janet. She seemed to be watching them with an almost relaxed interest. He probably need worry no more about her mind. Now that her fears had become something real and shared, she would hardly aberrate. No neuroses in wartime. One thing seemed likely about Janet, though—that she'd sensed the explosions telepathically. She'd screamed two or three seconds before he'd seen anything, and it takes light a second and a half to make the moon-earth trip.

There were some lights gleaming now on the dark side of the moon, near its center, one of them large enough to have an irregular appearance. Those must be chunks from Sinus Medii, the doctor told himself. He shivered.

The fastest moving Crisium chunks were now the moon's own width beyond the side of the moon.

"Eight minutes."

The professor's voice was almost normal again, though still hushed, as he calculated aloud, "One moon diameter in eight minutes. Round off to two thousand miles in five hundred seconds. Gives a chunk velocity of four miles a second. Needn't worry about the stuff from Crisium, Foecunditatis, even Nectaris. Won't come anywhere near us—miss earth by hundreds of thousands of miles. But the chunks from Medii are headed *here*, or near here. Starting near moon escape speed of a mile and a half a second it would take the chunks four days for the trip. But starting at around four miles a second, figure about one day. Yes, those Medii chunks should near-miss or hit us in about 24 hours—or at least close enough to that time so that we'll be on the impact side of earth."

When he finished he was no longer talking to himself and for the first time since the catastrophe began he had taken his eyes off the moon and was looking at his daughter and the doctor.

That he should be doing so was nothing exceptional. All over earth's evening side people who had been looking up in the sky were now looking around at each other.

The British Isles and West

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Africa missed the sight. There the moon, setting around midnight, had been down for a good hour.

In Asia and most of the Soviet Union it was day.

But all the Western Hemisphere—all the Americas—had a clear view of it.

The first conspicuous consequence was the rumor, traveling like a prairie fire, that the communist Russians were testing planet-killer bombs on the moon, or that World War Three had already started there. This rumor persisted long after Conelrad was on the air and the National Disaster Plan in effect. In the Eastern Hemisphere it metamorphosed into the rumor that the capitalist Americans, ever careless of the safety of the human race and invariably wasteful of natural resources, were ravishing Luna, ruining earth's only moon to satisfy the lusts of mad stockbrokers and insane artillery generals.

Less conspicuously, but quite as swiftly, the telescopes of the west began to sort out the Sinus Medii chunks and make preliminary estimates of their individual trajectories. Organized amateur meteor watchers rendered significant aid, particularly in keeping up to date, minute by minute, the map of the expanding chunk-jumble.

Very fortunately for the world, clear weather prevailed, cloud-cover everywhere was at a minimum—though in any case clouds could not have interfered with probably the most important telescope involved—that on the 24-hour satellite hanging 22,300 miles above the Pacific Ocean south of Mexico.

First observations added up to this: headed toward earth was a jumble of chunks ranging down in size from a planetoid ninety miles in diameter, a dozen fragments ten or more miles across, some three score of mass of the order of one cubic mile, and presumably any number of smaller chunks plus a thin cloud of moon-gravel and dust. They would reach the immediate vicinity of earth in almost exactly one day, conforming remarkably to Prof. McNellis' rough estimate. Those that entered earth's atmosphere would do so at a speed low for meteorites, yet high enough to burn up the very smallest and to ensure that the large chunks, little slowed by the air because of their great mass relative to cross-section, would strike the ground or the seas with impact speeds around six miles a second. The strike would be almost completely confined to the Western Hemisphere, clustering around the 120th meridian.

As soon as this last item of

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news was released, transocean airlines were besieged by persons loaded with money for tickets and bribes, and many did escape to the other side of the earth before most commercial planes were gone or grounded. Meanwhile numerous private planes took off on fantastically perilous transocean flights.

It was good that the telescopes of the Americas got to work swiftly. In six hours the earth's rotation had carried them out of sight of the moon and the Sinus swarm. First the Soviets and Asia, then Europe and Africa, moved into night and had their view of catastrophe hurtling down.

By that time the chunks from the three explosion sites on the moon's western rim had moved out far enough to be almost inconspicuous among the stars. But the Sinus swarm, steadily growing in apparent size and gradually fanning out, presented a brilliant spectacle, those against the dark half of the moon pocking it with points of light, those against the bright half more difficult to see but the largest visible as dark specks, while those that had fanned out most made a twinkling halo around Luna.

Asian and Russian, then European and African telescopes took up the task of charting chunk trajectories, ably supplementing the invaluable work of the moon 'scope in the 24-hour satellite, which kept up a steady flow of observation except for the two hours earth's intervening bulk cut it off from sight of the Sinus swarm. The satellite 'scope was especially helpful because, observing at radio-synchronized times in tandem with an earth 'scope, it was able to provide triangulations on a base some 25,000 miles long.

With incredulous shivers of relief it gradually became apparent that the 90-mile planetoid and many of the other large members of the swarm were going to shoot past earth on the side away from the sun. At first they had seemed to be the ones most on target, but since at a right angle to their explosion-velocity they all also had the moon's own orbital velocity of two-thirds of a mile a second, they drifted steadily east. A few might ruffle the top of the atmosphere, glowing in their passage, and all of them would go into long narrow elliptical orbits around earth, some of them perhaps slowing and falling in the far future, but that was now of less than no consequence.

It was in the chunks that had seemed sure to miss earth widely to the west that the danger lay. For these inevitably drifted east too—onto target.

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With maddening but unavoidable delays the major bulls-eye chunks were sorted out and their points of impact approximated, approximated more narrowly, and finally pinpointed. Once given, an evacuation order cannot be effectively rescinded, and an error of twenty miles in calculated point of impact would mean many evacuees fleeing to certain death.

By nightfall in London it was clear that a plus-ten-mile-diameter chunk would hit somewhere in the South Pacific and a plus-one-mile chunk in the American Northwest or British Columbia.

These two chunks were of special interest because they were the ones that the Russians and American moon-survey ships elected to ride down last.

Both survey ships had the good fortune to escape the blasts, and both had large fuel reserves since it had originally been planned that each should shift orbits several times during the survey. As soon as they became aware of the blasts and their effects each pilot independently decided that his greatest usefulness lay in matching trajectories with the Sinus swarm and riding it down to earth. Accordingly they broke out of their circumlunar orbits and blasted toward the twinkling jumble of moon-rock between them and the gleaming skyblue semicircle of earth, for them in half phase. As soon as, risking collisions with tailenders, they were able to report that they had caught up with the swarm, their radio signals were of unique service in determining the trajectory of the swarm, supplementing telescopic observations.

But the self-imposed task of the survey ships was to become even more perilous. By exactly matching trajectories with a large chunk—a matter largely of eyework and finicky correction blasts—and then holding that course for a matter of minutes, the survey ship's radio signals gave earth stations an exact fix on that chunk and its course, though at first there were confusions as to *which* chunk, judging by 'scope, the survey ship was matching orbits with. Thereafter it was for the pilots a matter of blasting gingerly over to the next major chunk, risking collision with minor fragments every second, and matching trajectories with *that*.

In its final trajectory-matching, the Russian ship satisfied earth stations that the plus-ten-mile chunk would land in the open Pacific midway between Baja California and Easter Island and between the Galapagos and Marquises. Warnings of giant waves had already gone out to the Pacific islands and

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coastal areas, but were now followed up with more specific alarms.

Immediately thereafter the Russian ship went out of radio contact 30,000 miles above the equator, possibly broached by one or more chunks while blasting sideways into a circumterran orbit. Its exact fate as a piece of matter was never known, but its performance was enshrined in men's hearts and helped raise the framework of the International Meteor Guard.

Twenty-two minutes later the 24-hour satellite had its own "curtain raising" encounter with the western edge of the swarm. It was twice holed, but its suited-up personnel effected repairs. A radarman was killed and the moon 'scope smashed.

Meanwhile both Americas had an unequalled sight of the Sinur swarm as earth's own shadow line moved from Recife to Quito and on from Halifax to Portland. As it approached its "comfortable" 1500-mile miss of earth, the 90-mile "Vermont-cubed" chunk attained the apparent size of the moon—a jagged moon, shaped like a stone arrowhead. Fierce soot-painted Indians discharged barbed arrows back at it from the banks of the Orinco, while at Walpi and Oraibi white-masked Hopi kachinas danced on imperturbably hour after hour.

Everywhere in the United States families sat outdoors or in their cars, listening to Conelrad, ready to move if advised. Already some were filing out like dispossessed ants from known danger points, crowding highways and railways, jamming the insides and clinging to the outsides of coaches, buses, and private cars, many simply legging it with their portable radios murmuring—most refugees tried to follow the insistently repeated advice from Conelrad to "keep listening for further possible revisions in your local impact points."

In a few cities there was a fairly orderly movement into bomb shelters. Stampedes, riots, and other disturbances were surprisingly few—the amazing spectacle in the night sky appeared to have an inhibiting effect.

Bizarre reactions occurred scatteredly. Some splinter religious and cultist groups gathered on hilltops to observe God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah. Others did the same thing simply for kicks, generally with the assistance of alcohol. A Greenwich Village group conducted solemn rooftop rites to propitiate the Triple Goddess in her role of Diana the Destroyer.

During the last hour several airports were invaded by survival-gangs and mobs convinced

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that only persons in the air when the swarm struck would survive the shock of impact, and a few overloaded planes, some commandeered, took off laboredly or crashed in the attempt.

Tom Kimbro rode the U. S. survey ship down along the final course of the plus-one-mile chunk, keeping about a quarter mile west of its raw gray side. While his ranging radio pulsed signals, he spoke a message over the voice circuit: "Ship's losing air. Must have sprung a seam on the last bump. But I'm safe in my suit. As I came from behind the moon on my last circuit, heading for the shadow line and Nectaris and just before I spotted the violet front and the Sinus chunks rising south, I think I saw *their* ships blasting away from the sun. There were five of them—skeletal ships—I could see the stars through them—with barely visible greenish jets. They set off those blasts like you'd set off firecrackers to scare dogs. I don't know. Give my love to Janet."

Immediately after that he successfully swung west into a braking orbit and brought down the ship safely next day on the Utah salt flats. His final trajectory-matching had helped pinpoint the exact spot near the center of the state of Washington where the Big Chunk would land.

The moon is made of rock that averages out a little more than three times as heavy as water. The Big Chunk had a mass of rather more than a thousand million tons. Its impact at almost six miles a second would release raw energy equivalent to about 1500 nominal atomic bombs (Hiroshima type), nothing unimaginable in an era of fusion bombs. There would not be the initial chromatic electromagnetic flash (heat, light, gamma rays) of an atomic weapon. A typical mushroom cloud would be raised, but the fallout would be clean, lacking radioactives. The blast wave would be the same, the earth shock heavier.

The Big Chunk would be only one of several almost as large hitting the Western Hemisphere along with almost countless other moon meteorites, many of them large enough to produce impact energy in the atomic-bomb range.

As the Sinus swarm traveled the last few hundred miles to impact or by-pass, gleaming with reflected sunlight in earth's night sky like so many newborn stars, a few showing jagged shapes, there was a breathtaking transformation. Beginning (for North American viewers) with those to the south, but rapidly traveling north across the sky, the lights of the Sinus swarm winked out as the chunks

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plunged into earth's shadow. To watchers it was as if the chunks had vanished. Some persons fell on their knees and gave thanks, believing that they had witnessed a miracle—a last-minute divine intervention. Then, again starting toward the south, dark red sparks began to glow almost where the Sinus lights had been and in the same general pattern, as the chunks entered the atmosphere and were heated toward incandescence by friction with air molecules.

Beginning in southern California, but swiftly fanning out north and east, every state in the Union had its own Great Sinus Shower. Dazzling ribbons and trails, ionization glows, heat glows, strange radio hissings and roars that came from the ground itself (energized by massive radio emanations from chunk trails in the ionosphere), explosions in the air as a few chunks tortured by heat blew apart, then the walloping deafening blast waves of the impacts, meteor-booms as their roar of passages finally caught up with the chunks, dust clouds spurting up to blanket the stars, wildly eddying winds, re-echoing reverberrations.

Then, at last, silence.

Every state in the Union had its casualties, heroisms, and freaks. Seven hundred deaths were subsequently verified, grimly settling once and for all the niggling old dispute as to whether a human being had ever really been killed by a meteorite, and it was assumed that at least three hundred more perished unrecorded. The city of Globe, Arizona, was destroyed by a direct hit after a commendably orderly and thorough evacuation. Three telephone girls at a town near Emporia, Kansas, and four radarmen at an early warning station north of Milwaukee stayed phoning Get-Out warnings and making last-minute observations until it was too late to escape physically from their point-of-impact posts. The inhabitants of a Saskatchewan village took a road 9 to death instead of a road 5 to safety, victims of someone's slovenly articulation. A Douglas DC-9 was struck and smashed in midair. A strike in the Texas Panhandle released a gusher of oil. A 25-square-block slum on Chicago's south side, long slated for clearance, was razed meteoritically.

Except within miles of major impact points, ground shock was surprisingly slight, less than that of a major earthquake, seismograph recordings nowhere indicating energy releases higher than 5 on Richter's logarithmic scale.

The giant waves did not quite live up to expectations either

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and although according to some calculations the Pacific Chunk should have raised the water level of earth's oceans by four hundredths of an inch, this increase was never verified by subsequent measurement. Nor was any island of moon rock miles high created in the Pacific —only the Sinus Shoal, formed by the break-up of the Pacific Chunk on impact and the distribution of its fragments across the bottom. At the time of the impact several fishing boats, private yachts, and one small steamer were never heard from again and presumably engulfed. Another steamer had its back broken by the first giant surge and sank, but its crew successfully abandoned ship and survived to a man, as did three persons on a balsa raft. These last claimed afterwards to have seen the Pacific Chunk at close range "hanging in the sky like a red-hot mountain." Hours later, California, Mexican, and South American beaches were impressively slopped over and there was some loss of life in the Hawaiian Islands, though the inhabitants of the 50th state were by then far more interested in the volcanic eruption that had been touched off by the odd chance of a sizable moon-chunk falling into one of the craters of the volcano Mauna Loa.

Alaska, eastern Siberia, and most of the Pacific Islands reported daytime meteor roars and some scattered impacts—including the spectacular spray plumes of ocean strikes—while by an almost amusing coincidence the widely separated cities of Canberra, Yokohama, and the town of Okhotsk were each simultaneously terrorized by a daytime meteor that glowed and roared miles (some said yards!) above the rooftops and then reportedly departed into space again without striking anywhere.

Janet McNellis, her father, and Dr. Snowden rode out the Washington blast with no great discomfort in the Professor's bomb shelter, though the doctor always afterwards looked a bit sourly at people who spoke of the "trivial" earthquake effects of the Great Sinus Shower. By dawn the dust had cleared sufficiently, the great mushroom cloud blowing away east, so that they had a clear view from their hilltop of a considerable segment of the blast area, on the margin of which they had survived.

The house behind them had its walls and roof buckled somewhat, but had not collapsed. The glass had been blown out of all the windows, although they had been left open before impact. Everywhere the white paint was smoothly shaded with green, as though by a giant airbrush—the

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great fist of the blast wave had worn a green glove of leaves and pine needles.

The naked trees from which the latter had been stripped marched disconsolately down the hillside. About a mile away these standing wooden skeletons began to give way to a limitless plain of bare-trunked fallen trees that the blast had combed as neatly as straight hair. As one studied them it became apparent that the fallen trunks radiated out from a blast center beyond the horizon and some fifteen miles away.

"Precisely like Kulik's photographs of the impact site of the Great Siberian Meteor of 1908!" Prof. McNellis commented.

Janet sighed and snuggled her coat a little more warmly around her. "You know," she remarked, "I don't think I'm going to have any more moon nightmares."

"I don't imagine you will," Dr. Snowden said carefully. "Earth has now received the warning of which your telepathic dreams, and those of many others, were a prevision."

"You think they really were telepathic?" she asked half skeptically.

He nodded.

"But *why* a warning?" the professor demanded. "Why *such* a warning? Why not at least talk to us first?"

He seemed to be asking the questions more of the bare tree-trunks than of his daughter or the doctor, nevertheless the latter ventured a speculative answer.

"Maybe *they* don't think we're worth talking to, only worth scaring. I don't know. Maybe they *did* talk to us—maybe that's what the dreams were. They might be a telepathic race, you know, and assume the same means of communication in others. Maybe they only set off their intimidation-blasts after we didn't answer them, or seemed to answer insanely."

"Still, *such* a warning."

The doctor shrugged. "Perhaps they thought it was exactly what we deserve. After all, we must seem a menacing species in some respects—reaching out for the stars when we're still uncertain as to whether it wouldn't be best for one half of our race to destroy the other half." He sighed. "On the other hand," he said, "maybe some of the creatures with whom we share the universe are simply not sane by our standards. Maybe if we knew all we could know about them with our limited minds, we'd still judge them maniacs. I don't know. What we do know now is something we should have known all the time: that we're not the only inhabitants of the galaxy and obviously not—yet—the most powerful."

THE END

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The crime was new—as far as The Spore *was concerned. But the motive was as old as woman.*

MARIWITE

By CHARLES L. FONTENAY

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

SINGING, at least, was to be. So Artaperi sang.

There could be little else of being within the *Spore,* for the things that for man had been were in abeyance for these many generations. There could be nothing of trade, there could be nothing of roaming; there could be nothing of struggle, nothing of glory and power. There could only be something of loving, which faded for having naught to rasp its smoothness; and something of dreaming, which palled for having no awakening; and, sometimes, something of singing.

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The *Spore* was a cloister, to which man surrenders himself for the hope of heaven; and in the cloister is no living, but only faith.

So Artaperi sat in the place that was his by right, and sang with the great singing in the midst of the masked swirling of the Two Light-Year Festival. But, as Artaperi did not know, there moved through the swirling one who was to restore to him, for a time, being.

Artaperi sat on a dais at the edge of the Great Square, sipping mint tea between the verses of the song. There came, in the great press of people, Mariwite by the dais. Artaperi recognized her, despite the unicorn-mask, by her form and her movement, for Artaperi had known her body once, for a time.

She would have passed, swiftly, but Artaperi held out his hand and spoke to her to stop. She stopped reluctantly, and the blank eyes of the unicorn-mask stared up to the dais.

"Mariwite, come and have tea with me," he invited.

"I beg leave, Artaperi," she responded, her voice muffled by the mask. "I seek . . . I beg leave."

"Come up," he commanded. "There is nothing of business or appointments this Festival."

She bowed the unicorn-mask in acquiescence and came around the dais, for the steps to it were behind it from the Great Square.

The luminous roof of the Third Level shed a changing light of many hues over the Great Square, adding to the kaleidoscopic effect of the Festival. The seething mass of people in the Square moved and swayed and jostled. Hundreds of masks of remembered creatures from Earth Behind were tilting and turning there: dog-masks and cat-masks, lion-masks and crow-masks, mouse-masks and buffalo-masks, even witch-masks and ghost-masks.

Artaperi almost could have thought he was aboard the legendary Noah's Ark—as, in a sense, he was.

The singing rang:

Earth, from thee
To far Centaurus
Rides the soul of man,
Trustees we
To heav'n o'er us,
In this caravan . . .

It was a semi-religious hymn, *The Song of the Journey*, a rededication of the men and women of the *Spore* to the task which they had not begun and would not finish. Those born on Earth have a choice, but the long traveler between the stars is caught in his fate, without glory, between his adventurous ancestors and his adventurous descendants.

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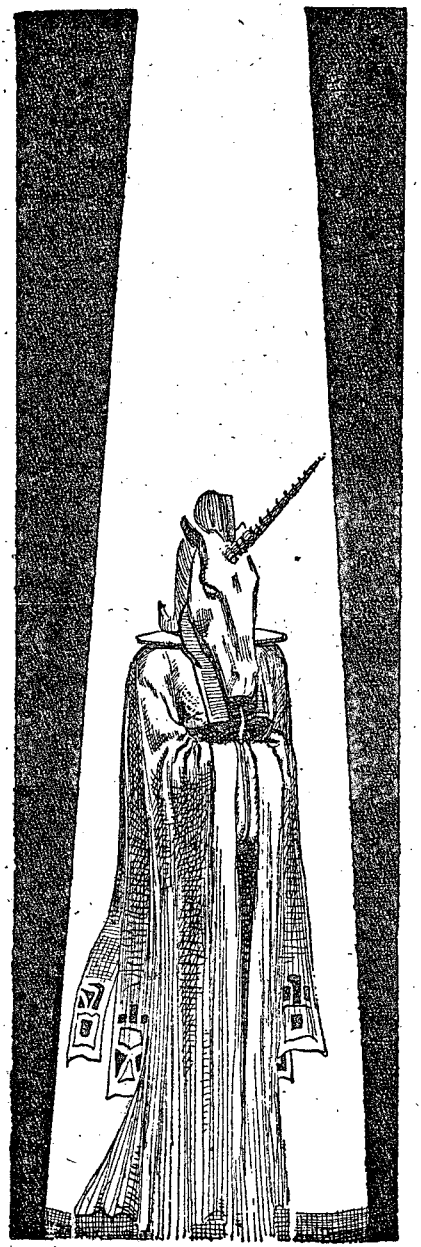

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Mariwite sat down at the table opposite Artaperi and he poured her a cup of steaming mint tea. With white, delicate hands, she removed the unicorn-mask.

She was full-faced now, in her early forties, and the dark hair was greying. But there were still the sympathetic dark eyes and the full sensitive mouth that Artaperi remembered from years back, when he had parted from her in sorrow and in mercy.

The years cannot be repeated and, on the *Spore*, mercilessly, a child cannot be repeated.

"It's good to see you again, Mariwite," said Artaperi, smiling middle-aged at her. "How's the library?"

"About the same as ever," she answered, with a slow, almost timid smile of her own. "Sometimes I think the people nowadays tend too much to less serious reading, but perhaps that's because I'm getting older."

The words were all right, but Artaperi's business was faces and tones of voice.

"Is something troubling you, Mariwite?" he asked.

"No . . . no . . ." she murmured, but the rush of her face revealed turmoil.

"Has something happened to stir the old memory?" he probed gently.

"No, Artaperi, no! Please! No psychoanalysis now!"

She was so anguished that he decided to wait. After all, it was the Festival. She finished her tea with trembling hands and took her leave, apologetically.

A few minutes after she left him, a donkey's head pushed its way through the singing crowd to the edge of the dais. The donkey's head was removed to reveal the anxious face of Lijons, the assistant astrogator.

"Artaperi!" he cried, and said something more that was lost in the swell of the singing.

"Climb up, so I can hear you," shouted Artaperi, leaning forward and extending his hand.

Lijons clambered up on the dais, carrying his mask with one hand.

"Artaperi, you must come to the North Blister at once," he panted, his eyes wide with excitement. "Filbroun is dead!"

"Ah, I am sorry. I did not know Filbroun was ill. I shall report his death to the chief statistician for you and have the announcement made, if the grief is too great for you. But you are chief astrogator now, and I cannot leave the Square in the midst of the Festival singing."

"You don't understand!" exclaimed Lijons. "Filbroun was killed by a weapon and . . ."

His eyes darkened with the horrified incredibility of it, and his voice sank lower:

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". . . and he could not have killed himself!"

Artaperi went grey and frozen with shock. What Lijons had just told him was impossible. There had been a wave of suicides during the first century of the *Spore's* journey, but not a single one since then. As for the kind of death implied when the weapon could not be found . . . Artaperi's mind refused to take him farther.

"It must have been an accident," he said frigidly, rising from his seat. "I shall go back with you."

Leaving his eagle-mask on the dais, Artaperi entered the door behind it, with Lijons at his heels. They walked down a corridor to the nearest elevator and dropped swiftly, level after level, to the vast Mid-Level.

This was the level Artaperi liked best of all, even more than the high-domed First Level. The fields and meadows of the Mid-Level stretched out into the distance on all sides, lost at last in a bluish haze. Neat farmhouses and barns were scattered at intervals, while cattle and sheep grazed in the pastures. Here on the Mid-Level, as nowhere else, a man could escape the crowds and stretch his legs.

Artaperi and Lijons left the elevator, and Artaperi thrust his metal identification tag into the car-checker near it. The checker flashed a green light at him, and a barrier was raised automatically behind one of the dozen electric cars parked beside it. Artaperi and Lijons climbed into the car, Artaperi taking the wheel.

He backed the car out, and turned its nose onto the road north. For more than an hour they sped along curving roads, through green fields and greener groves, across sparkling brooks and past contented groups of white farm buildings. As they rode, a recurrent wish plagued Artaperi again: that the Placement Machine had tapped him for a simple agricultural life instead of the responsible position he held.

Lijons started to tell him of finding Filbroun's body, but Artaperi cut him off.

"Not until I have seen the situation myself," he said. "I don't want to be prejudiced by your views, and they would inevitably creep into any narration of the matter."

So they talked of other things, and at last the blue haze ahead of them faded into the gleaming metal of the Inner Skin. They reached it and Artaperi stopped the car.

It was a metal wall that stopped the world. The farmland ran up to it, and grass and trees grew against it. It stretched up-

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ward to the luminous roof, and it stretched away on both sides, curving gently, until it was lost in the haze of the Mid-Level.

The two men left the car and entered a door through the Inner Skin. They were in a long, dim corridor that stretched outward and pressed in closely on them. They entered a railed car which took them swiftly along the corridor for about two miles, to the airlock of the North Blister.

The North Blister was one of two observatories on the surface of the *Spore*. When they entered it, the artificial gravity shifted for them, so that "down" was no longer toward the floors of the inside levels, but toward the surface of the great starship.

It was one tremendous, transparent dome. Here there was nothing above but an unutterable vastness of black, star-studded space, that seemed to draw them terribly outward. Lijons was accustomed to this, but Artaperi, who rarely visited the Blisters, struggled with a sickly dizziness.

In the center of the observatory, before a big desk, Filbroun sprawled in a chair, dead.

Artaperi approached and examined the dead man. There was a blood-stained hole in the front of his tunic, and another hole in the back. Lodged in the wooden back of the chair was a shapeless lead pellet.

Lijons was right. Filbroun had been shot with a gun, and there was no gun in sight.

Lijons was right in another respect. Filbroun's death definitely was within Artaperi's province as chief psychologist.

It was impossible, but the facts spoke for themselves. Filbroun had been murdered.

It was the first murder in the nearly four hundred years of the *Spore's* journey through space, and it was laid squarely in Artaperi's lap.

"Now," said Artaperi, dropping into a chair well removed from Filbroun's body and clinging to its arms (for he still felt the dizzying effects of empty space above and around him), "tell me about finding the body."

"I was working in the South Blister," said Lijons. "I was on my way to the Two Light-Year Festival in the Square, because I knew Filbroun was working in the North Blister and I thought there should be someone representing him on the astrogator's dais. My home is only two levels above the Mid-Level and in the southern sector, so I detoured by the South Blister to finish some records before going on to the Square.

"I got a telephone call from Filbroun. I don't know what had awakened him to his social responsibilities, but he had de-

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cided he should go to the Square himself and wanted me to come to the North Blister and take over his observations.

"When I got here, he was like you see him. There was no one else around. I couldn't find the weapon that killed him."

"Why didn't you telephone me instead of coming after me?" asked Artaperi.

"Because there isn't a telephone on the dais. I didn't want to send a message, because I didn't think anybody else should know about it."

"You could have had me called to the telephone."

"I thought of that later, when I had almost reached the Square," answered Lijons. "I suppose I was too excited and upset to think about it earlier."

Artaperi rose and went back to study Filbroun's dead face.

Filbroun had been very old—Artaperi did not know just how old without looking at the records, but he estimated Filbroun had been in his eighties. Lijons himself was in his fifties, and had been assistant astrogator for more than twenty years.

Filbroun's hair and heavy beard were white. His eyes were closed behind his heavy spectacles, and there was a look of final peace on his lined face.

"At least," said Lijons reverently, "he died under the stars he loved."

"This is beyond my experience," said Artaperi. "I must study some of the old books from Earth. Can the Blister be locked?"

"The door at the other end of the corridor can," said Lijons. "The Blisters are kept locked when no one is working in them."

"Let's leave Filbroun here and lock it, then, until we get back," commanded Artaperi.

They left the North Blister together and returned to the Great Square. At the first interlude between the singing, Artaperi had an announcement made calling the chief statistician and the chief librarian to his dais.

A few moments later, Haralking, the chief statistician, came to the dais, removing a goat-mask as he climbed the steps.

"It is necessary," said Artaperi, after their formal greeting, "to make the announcement that Filbroun is dead, and to set the Placement Machine to select the mother of the new child."

On the *Spore*, every death made room for a new life. The population of the great ship was maintained at a constant figure. Rigid birth control was practiced, and the occasional unauthorized children were destroyed immediately.

"I am sorry at this, for Filbroun was a friend," said Ha-

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ralking. "I shall make the announcement."

As he spoke, Mariwite came upon the dais, her mask in her hand.

"I have been telling Haralking that Filbroun is dead," said Artaperi.

Her dark eyes widened. For a long moment she said nothing.

"Why am I called to be told this?" she asked then in a low voice that trembled a little. "Filbroun had nothing to do with the library."

"No, that is true," agreed Artaperi, lifting his eyebrows in surprise more at her agitation than at her question. "I called you because the manner of Filbroun's death makes it necessary that I get certain reading tapes from the library. You see, Filbroun was murdered."

Mariwite gasped, and seemed unable to speak.

"It is a shock to know that a person has been murdered," said Artaperi sympathetically, "and you must tell no one else for a while. But I must have all the old tapes that were brought from Earth Behind on crime detection and psychology."

Mariwite dropped her face in her hands and sobbed. Haralking, somewhat embarrassed, arose.

"I must make the announcement," he said, and took his leave.

Artaperi patted Mariwite's shoulder.

"Come," he said. "Filbroun was old and would have died before many years. But I must find the warped mind that did the deed and prescribe corrective treatment, lest someone else should be slain."

She gained control of herself with an effort and raised a tear-streaked face to him.

"I am at your command," she said. "Let us go to the library, and I will check out whatever tapes you wish."

To save time, Artaperi checked out all the spools of tape in the crime section of the great library and had them sent by conveyor to his home.

"It would take an hour or two to check out all the titles, card by card," said Mariwite as the two of them walked from the stack-room back to her office. "I'll just put a note in the section box that you have taken out all the tapes."

Mariwite's private office was clean, almost bare. Artaperi knew why. Its clean bareness was symbolic to her: she kept it clean of painful memories.

"Sit down and have some tea," Mariwite invited.

Artaperi took a seat in one of the straight-backed, stern chairs, and Mariwite opened a small cupboard and took out a teapot.

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Artaperi remembered the day he had accompanied her into this office, when she had become chief librarian. Mariwite had been pretty and gay then, the youngest woman ever to become chief librarian since the long journey from Earth began. Artaperi and Mariwite had been but three months married that day.

"I can see I have a lot of work to do," Mariwite had said, clucking her tongue as she looked about the cluttered office. "I'm going to make this a pleasant place to work—something that suits my personality."

"If it suits your personality, it'll be beautiful," Artaperi answered her.

In a few days, she had converted the messy working quarters of her predecessor into a cozy haven, a second home. Paintings of ancient Earth scenes hung on the walls, the comfortable chairs were covered with flowered slips, even the desk lost its hard, business-like appearance and resembled a woman's desk in a home study.

Those were happy days for Artaperi and Mariwite, for they loved each other devotedly. Artaperi was the handsomest young man in their little space-borne world, and Mariwite was the most beautiful young woman. They were happy in their respective fields, and looked forward to a long life together.

The happiest moment of their married life came three years after marriage, when the Placement Machine selected Mariwite as the mother of the next child. At every death, they had waited breathlessly, hoping. Now the factors pointed to Mariwite: her physical condition was good, she possessed desirable hereditary qualities, and there was no older woman of child-bearing age aboard the *Spore* who had not borne at least one child.

It was a glorious consummation to their marriage, glorious in a way that could not be imagined on faraway Earth, where conception and birth were free and unrestricted. They waited anxiously, joyously, for the child's birth.

And their daughter was born dead.

The framework of society aboard the *Spore* did not permit Mariwite a second chance unless, years later, her turn should come around again. There was a second chance for Artaperi, a few years later, for marriage was not a requirement for childbirth aboard the starship; marriage was a companionable atmosphere in which to grow the lasting love between a man and a woman. The Placement Machine often selected unmarried women as prospective mothers.

So Artaperi became the father

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of a child by another woman; but long before that happened, his marriage with Mariwite had ended. Stunned at the death of their child, Mariwite turned her back on life and retired to the only haven she knew from her tortured emotions: the library. She turned her back on their marriage, too.

"I'm sorry, Artaperi," she told him. "I don't know whether I love you as I did or not, for there's no feeling left in me now. But I do know that I couldn't stand to continue living with you as your wife. It would always remind me of the happiness we had, and lost."

So now Artaperi sat in the office of the woman who had once been his wife and sipped tea politely with her, and the office was cold and clean, with nothing in it to remind Mariwite of love or marriage.

He finished his tea and rose.

"I must get to work," he said. "The sooner I find the killer, the sooner he can be given needed psychiatric treatment and removed as a menace to others."

"I don't see how you expect to find him, without any more information than you say you have," observed Mariwite.

"Oh, I'll find him. I don't know just how I'll proceed about it yet, but something like that can't be concealed for long in a population as small as this one."

"You seem very confident," she murmured, her dark eyes downcast.

"I am. I've never had any experience with the psychology of a murderer, but there is no quirk in human psychology that can't be detected. If it appeared once and caused the person to kill someone, it will appear again and I would eventually find Filbroun's killer even if I did nothing but sit back and watch. I'm going to study these files because on Earth Behind, where murder is well-known, they must have developed methods of detecting a murderer faster—before he kills again."

The lights aboard the *Spore* were dimming into "night" when Artaperi arrived at his home. It was a small apartment, for Artaperi had not remarried after his separation from Mariwite and living quarters were assigned by the Placement Machine on the basis of need not position.

He dialed supper and it popped out on his small table, fragrant and steaming. He ate slowly, his thoughts more on Mariwite than the problem at hand.

How many years had it been since their mutual tragedy? He counted back in his mind, and was startled. It had been more than sixteen years since their marriage had ended.

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Mariwite still brooded, of that he was sure. He wondered if he had failed in his duty to her. Walicuper, his predecessor as chief psychologist, had advised against psychological treatment for her at the time.

"It is a natural shock, and time is the best cure for it," Walicuper had said. "I've checked her background, and I don't think there are any factors that could aggravate the emotional upset into something serious—although, of course, one can't be sure."

Several times since Walicuper's death made him chief psychologist, Artaperi had thought of suggesting psychological treatment to her, but he had not. She seemed to have adjusted well enough. He did not think she was particularly happy, but there was no guarantee that treatment, raking open the old wound, would make her happier. And Artaperi was reluctant to initiate treatment because of the personality relationship arising from the fact that he once had been her husband.

Finishing his meal, Artaperi turned to the task of screening the great jumble of reading tapes that filled the conveyor hopper of his apartment.

He had noted from the records at Mariwite's office that the crime tapes were little-used. Once, in the early days of the journey, they had been popular, but later generations were not much interested in them. The people of the *Spore* liked to read adventure tapes and others that lent them an active, vicarious existence they could not experience for themselves. But in a society where crime was almost non-existent, the psychology of crime was too baffling for people to gain much enjoyment from reading of it.

A large percentage of the stack of tapes was fiction, and these Artaperi laid aside. His perusal of selected non-fiction works took him all night.

When, tired and red-eyed, he went to bed as the lights of the ship were brightening into "day" again, he had assimilated two major objectives in the normal search for a murderer.

These were *Look for the weapon* and *Look for the motive.*

When he considered these objectives, on awaking several hours later, they appeared logical. They surprised him with their simplicity.

The part of the weapon in Filbroun's slaying was such a dead, mechanical thing that it had not occurred to Artaperi that its identity might be valuable in finding the slayer. But apparently the ancestors on Earth had developed clever means of seeking a murderer through the murder weapon. They checked own-

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ership, they checked ballistics, they checked fingerprints.

As a psychologist, the idea of looking for the motive should have occurred to him, but it had not. Murder was such an abnormal thing that Artaperi had automatically assumed any motivation for it must be buried deep in the murderer's unconscious mind. He had thought in terms of watching for any betraying abnormality in personality, rather than cogitating over a logical motive.

He would initiate a search for the weapon that had killed Filbroun, but he did not expect satisfactory results, even if it were found. No one owned weapons on the *Spore*; all weapons were stored against the ship's arrival at its destination in generations to come. A ballistics check would prove nothing except that the weapon found was the murder weapon. Fingerprints might track down the killer, but Artaperi was by no means sure that anyone aboard the starship could obtain clear fingerprints either from the gun or the populace, as simple as the technique appeared to be.

The question of motive was something else. From what he knew of Filbroun's life, he could not imagine a motive immediately. Filbroun had lived much to himself. He was not friendly to people, but he was no one's enemy, so far as Artaperi knew.

Only Lijons stood to benefit by Filbroun's death, by succeeding to the position of chief astrogator; but Filbroun had been very old, and Lijons would not have had to wait many more years for that, in any event. It was incredible that Lijons would have gone to such an abnormal extreme as murder merely to hasten acquisition of a position that was, in effect, little more than a title.

The ancient tapes from Earth spoke of achievement of wealth as a motive for murder; but there was no such thing as money or commerce aboard the *Spore*. Property was community-owned. The tapes spoke, too, of jealousy as a motive; but Filbroun had been too old to have dealings with women for many years.

Revenge? Perhaps. But Artaperi would have to delve far back into the past to find anyone whom this recluse might have injured.

After a light breakfast Artaperi, with a sigh, returned to his perusal of the tapes, seeking additional information which might help him.

The third tape he picked up was something different and puzzling. On the spool it had no title, but a code number. And when he ran it on the projector, it did not appear to be a reading

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tape on crime, either fiction or fact. It contained names and statistics.

The statistics were presented without explanation, evidently identified by a numbered code, but the names were women's names . . . and shortly Artaperi ran across a name he recognized. Startled, he looked at the spool again. It was no ancient tape from Earth: the date on it was recent within the month.

He ran the spool through. All the names were women's names, at least a hundred of the approximately five thousand women and girls aboard the *Spore*. He could identify some of the statistics: ages, bodily measurements, figures of that nature. The terminology used for others was not familiar.

Artaperi telephoned Haralking, the chief statistician.

"Do you not," he asked Haralking, "have duplicate records that can be read, in addition to the punched tapes that go into the Placement Machine?"

"Yes," answered Haralking. "The duplicate records are kept on reading tapes at the library."

"I think I have picked up one of them from the library by mistake," said Artaperi. "You would do me a great service by coming to my home and identifying it. If it is what I think it is, I may ask a great favor of you."

"Certainly," agreed Haralking. "I shall come at once."

After breaking the connection with Haralking, Artaperi dialed Mariwite's number.

"If I may, I plan to come to the library and visit you in about two hours," he told her. "But I need some information now, and you would do me a kindness to look it up. You can read the statistics in the duplicate records of the Placement Machine there, can't you?"

"Yes," said Mariwite.

"I need some information about Filbroun. Will you find his record in the tape and tell me if his last physical examination showed him to be suffering from any illness?"

"Certainly," she said.

Fifteen minutes later, she called him back.

"I ran the tape with Filbroun's record on the projector," Mariwite told him. "I don't know why you suspected it, but you were right. Filbroun was a victim of cancer."

"What was the prognosis?"

"I don't know his medical history from the record, of course, but apparently it was discovered too late for effective treatment, or else treatment failed. The record does estimate he had two more years to live."

"Thank you, Mariwite," said Artaperi. Frowning thoughtfully, he broke the connection and

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sat back to await Haralking's arrival.

Two hours later, Artaperi sat in Mariwite's surgically clean office across the desk from her, sipping mint tea.

"I assumed this was to be a business call," she said, giving him a puzzled smile, "but you've been here twenty minutes and have engaged in nothing but small talk."

"One should not talk business over tea," chided Artaperi gently. "Besides, perhaps I chose to just pay a social call on you, Mariwite. I seem to recall that I paid many social calls on you, years ago, with a purpose in mind."

She laughed.

"You were trying to persuade me to marry you then," she countered. "You could hardly have the same objective now."

"I might," he said. "Neither of us is too old for marriage. And should you be selected as a prospective mother, don't you think children are raised better in a home with a father?"

"You can't expect me to be so fortunate!" she exclaimed, blushing. Then she teased: "If I were, Artaperi, perhaps I should choose someone else as the father this time."

He looked at her soberly.

"I had been thinking of psychological treatment for you, Mariwite," he remarked, "but you seem in a better frame of mind than I have seen you in all the years since our marriage. This is the first time that references to children and childbirth haven't appeared to cause you pain."

"I don't want psychological treatment," she said in a voice that was suddenly tense. Her eyes were frightened. "I don't need it."

A buzzer sounded and a red light began flashing behind her desk. This was the signal that an announcement of importance or interest to all the people of the *Spore* was about to be made over the general communications system.

Mariwite leaned forward and flicked a switch on her desk. The speaker in the wall behind her came to life with a hum, and she half turned in her chair to listen.

"Attention, attention," said the speaker. "This is an announcement by Haralking, chief statistician."

There was a pause, then Haralking's deep voice came in.

"Due to the sudden death of Filbroun, chief astrogator, a vacancy exists in the population," said Haralking. "The qualifications of adult women have been run through the Placement Machine for selection of the woman who is to mother the child to fill this vacancy. I have here the se-

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lection made by the Placement Machine."

He paused and cleared his throat. Despite Mariwite's earlier words, Artaperi's eyes did not miss the fact that she leaned forward eagerly, waiting.

"The woman selected," said Haralking solemnly, "is Jaanfini, an employe of the disease prevention section of the health division."

As his words died away, Mariwite sat without moving, as though paralyzed, her eyes fixed on the speaker. Artaperi quietly leaned forward and switched off the communicator.

Suddenly Mariwite jumped from her chair and stood facing him, her dark eyes blazing.

"That's wrong!" she cried. "It can't be right! I was first in qualifications. Jaanfini was second! Her turn comes after mine."

"That's true," said Artaperi calmly, watching her. "But you were disqualified, Mariwite."

"Why?" she demanded, almost hysterically. "Why should I be disqualified?"

"Because you're going to have to take psychological treatment immediately."

She leaned forward and clasped her hands pleadingly.

"Oh, no, Artaperi! Did you disqualify me? I told you I don't need psychological treatment. I've recovered from my sorrow over our child's death. Truly, I have! Can't you see that, Artaperi?"

"I'm afraid not," he said sadly. "If you had, you wouldn't have killed Filbroun."

She stared at him, and tears began to fill the big, dark eyes. Then she sank into her chair and bowed her face in her hands. She wept, rocking back and forth.

"I had to," she sobbed. "He would have died soon, anyway, but I was afraid it would be too late. Only another year or two, Artaperi, and I won't be able to bear children. Filbroun was the oldest, and I waited for him, and waited, but he wouldn't die. Why shouldn't he die a little sooner, so I could have a child?"

"So you just hurried things up a little," said Artaperi. "I'm sorry, Mariwite, but that's still an unbalanced reaction. You're going to have to take psychological treatment, and it will last a long time. We can't take chances that you may go completely insane and harm someone else."

She raised a tear-stained face to him.

"But how did you know I did it?" she whispered. "I studied the crime files. I was careful. I even ejected the weapon into space from the North Blister after I shot him."

"You studied the duplicate records of the Placement Ma-

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chine, too," said Artaperi. "You had to, to know that your qualifications were such that you'd be selected as the prospective mother this time.

"You were suspect, first because it was logical that a murderer would study the crime tapes to try to avoid discovery, and no one had checked out any of them recently. You alone, or one of the library employes, could have read the crime tapes without checking them out.

"But I really began to suspect you only when I suspected the motive for the murder. When you were reading the duplicate records of the Placement Machine, you accidentally returned one of them to the crime section instead of to the section in which it belonged."

She looked at him with something akin to hatred.

"Why didn't you come and take me at once," she demanded, "instead of torturing me by letting me hear that Jaanfini had been chosen?"

"Because I wasn't sure," said Artaperi. "I had to arrange with Haralking to make the announcement on a closed circuit to your office, so you would give yourself away by your reaction to it. I'm sorry, Mariwite."

He arose and laid his hand gently on the arm of the woman who once had been his wife.

"Come," he said. "You must enter detention. The things we shall teach you to accept will not make you happy, but you will at least learn to adjust yourself to the restrictions of a life that we cannot help—one that was chosen for us by our ancestors on Earth Behind many generations ago."

With a final sob of resignation, she arose and looked around the neat office which had been so long her fortress against reality, bidding it farewell.

Then, submissively, as she had done many years before when she was his wife, she took Artaperi's arm. Together they left the room.

THE END

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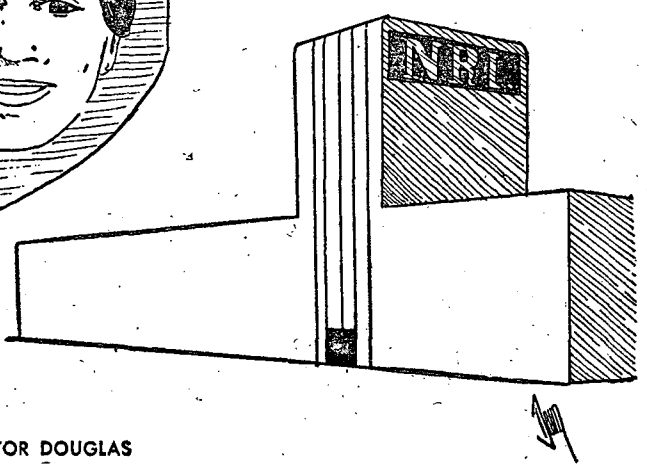
DONOR

By JAMES E. GUNN

No one could suspect
that a man who could
live forever would
risk eternity for a
child he had never seen.

THE search had been organized to last a hundred years. Half of that period was already gone, and the search was no nearer success than when it had started. Only the ultimate desperation



ILLUSTRATOR DOUGLAS

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can keep hope alive without periodic transfusions of results.

The National Research Institute was unique. It had no customers and no product. Its annual statement was printed all in red. And yet the tight-lipped donors made their contributions regularly and without complaint. Whenever one died, his estate was inherited by the Institute.

The purpose of the Institute was learning but not education. It had an omnivorous appetite for information of all kinds, particularly that on paper: vital statistics, newspaper clippings, hospital records, field reports. . . . A Potomac of paper flowed through the gray, bombproof monolith near Washington, D. C., and was reduced to meaningful punchings of holes or alignments of electrons from which computers would make esoteric comparisons or draw indecipherable conclusions.

Possibly only one man in the Institute knew its function. The thousands of other employees, many of whom were not listed on the payroll, performed their duties blindly, accepted their generous salaries, and asked no questions. If they wished to keep their jobs, that is.

The Institute survived on hope and thrived on death.

The main copy room was confusion which seemed to escape growing into chaos only by accident. Mail was opened, entered, stapled, and passed along assembly lines. Newspapers were scanned by reading machines and then checked, line by line, by human readers. Copy boys raced along the aisles on roller skates. Clerks bluepenciled and clipped and commented to the automatic typers. Operators punched holes in blank cards or electrons out of blank atoms. . . .

Edwin Sibert threaded his way between the desks with a taut feeling of excitement as if he were on his way to a rendzvous with the world's most desirable woman. The copy room was old to him; he had spent six months there without learning anything. He didn't glance at it as he climbed the steps behind the office set over the copy room like a guardroom over a prison yard.

The outer office was lined with locked filing cabinets; their contents were meaningless. A colorless, elderly filing clerk puttered among the papers in one of them.

"Hello Sanders," Sibert said carelessly.

The desk by the door leading into the inner office was equipped with a switchboard, a scrambler, an automatic recorder, and a lovely, dark-haired secretary. Her eyes had widened as Sibert entered.

"Hello, Liz," he said, his voice as effective as his appearance.

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"Locke in?" He moved past her to the door without waiting for an answer.

"You can't, Ed—" she began, springing to her feet, "Mr. Locke will—"

"Be very angry if he doesn't get my news immediately," Sibert finished. "I've found the key, Liz. Get it—Locke, key? A poor thing but mine own." He drew skillful fingers along the smooth curve of her throat and jaw.

She caught his hand, held it to her cheek for a moment. "Oh, Ed!" she said brokenly. "I'm—"

"Be good, Liz," he said gayly, his blue eyes smiling gently in his expressive blond face. "Maybe—a little later—who knows? Never can tell—"

But there would be no "later" —they both knew that. He had wasted a month on her before he was sure she knew nothing. He pulled his hand free and opened the door and stepped into the inner office.

Beyond Locke was an entire wall of two-way glass. From here, the general manger could watch the copy room direct or, if he wished, switch to indirect observation of the other rooms and offices of the windowless building. Locke was talking to someone on his private phone.

"Patience is our greatest asset," he said. "After all, Ponce de Leon. . . ."

Silbert turned his head quickly, but he caught only a glimpse of a face that great age had unsexed. It was wrinkled and gray and dead except for the eyes that still burned with life and desire.

"Interruption," Locke said smoothly. "Call you back." The screen set into the wall opposite him went dark as he touched the arm of his executive chair. "Sibert," he continued, "you're fired."

Locke was no youngster, himself, Sibert thought. He was pushing ninety, surely, although he looked fit and vigorous. Medical care had kept his body healthy; geriatrics and hormone injections had kept his shoulders broad, his muscles firm and unwithered. But they could not rejuvenate his old heart, his aging arteries.

"Right," Sibert said briskly, another man than the one who had spoken to the secretary in the outer office. "Then you won't be interested in my information. So long."

"Maybe I was hasty," Locke said. His lips framed the unfamiliar words awkwardly. "If your information is important, I might reconsider."

"And a bonus, too?" Sibert prompted.

"Maybe," Locke growled, his eyes small. "Now what's so earth-shattering that it can't come through channels?"

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Sibert studied Locke's face. It had not spent all its days in an office. There were scars around the eyes and a long one down one cheek almost to the point of the jaw; the nose had been broken at least once. Locke was an old bear. He must be careful, Sibert thought, not to tease him too much.

"I think I've found one of Marshall Cartwright's children."

Locke's face writhed for a moment before he got it back under control. "Where? What name is he using? What's he—"

"Slow down," Sibert said calmly. He deposited his lean, young body in the upholstered chair beside the desk and leisurely lit a cigarette. "I've been working in the dark for five years. Before I give anything away, I want to know what I've got."

"You're well paid," Locke said coldly. "If this pans out, you'll never have to worry about money. But don't try to cut yourself into the game, Sibert. It's too big for you."

"That's what I keep thinking about," he mused. "A few hundred thousand bucks—what's that to an organization that spends at least one hundred million a year. Fifty years of that is five billion dollars. Just to find somebody's kids."

"We can get the information out of you."

"Not in time. And time is what you don't have. I left a letter. If I don't get back soon, the letter gets delivered. And Cartwright's kid is warned that he is being hunted. . . ."

"Let me check that statement with scopolamine."

"No. Not because it isn't true. You might ask other questions. And it would take too long. That's why I couldn't wait for an appointment. Try to squeeze the information out if you want to." He lifted his right hand out of his jacket pocket; a tiny, ten-shot automatic was in it. "But it might take too long. And you might lose everything just when everything is within your grasp. You might die. Or I might die."

Locke sighed heavily and let his heavy shoulders relax. "What do you want to know?"

"What's so important about Cartwright's kids?"

"Barring accidents, they'll live forever."

The middle-aged man walked slowly through the station, his face preoccupied, his hands thrust deep in his jacket pockets. He rescued an overnight bag from a locker and took it to the nearest washroom, where he rented a booth. He never came out of the washroom. A reservation on the Talgo express to Toronto was never picked up.

A young man with a floppy hat and a Conquistador beard caught

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a taxi outside the station and left it in the middle of a traffic jam in the business section, walked quickly between the immovable cars until he reached the adjacent street, where he caught a second taxi going in the opposite direction. At the airport, he picked up a no-show reservation on the first out-going flight.

At Detroit, he caught a jet to St. Louis. There he changed to a slow, turbo-prop transport to Wichita. He hired an old, two-seater propeller-driven plane, filed a flight plan, and proceeded to ignore it. Two hours later he sat down at Kansas City's Municipal Airport and caught a decrepit bus across the crumbling New Hannibal Bridge to the downtown shopping district.

It was decaying. Business had followed the middle class into the suburbs. Buildings and shops had not been repaired for a decade. Only a few people were on the street, but the young man with the beard did the best he could, ducking through arcades, waiting in doorways, and finally edging into a department-store elevator just as the doors closed.

The car creaked upward. When it reached the fifth floor, only the young man and the operator, a stooped, wrinkled gnome well into his eighties, were left. The young man walked swiftly through the floor to the Men's room.

Two minutes later he flushed an ugly, black mass of hair down the toilet, buried a hat under a heap of paper towels, and grinned at his reflection in the mirror. "Greetings, Mr. Sibert," he said gayly. "What was it Locke said to you?"

"*'You were an actor, weren't you, Sibert?'*"

"*'Once. Not a very good one, I'm afraid.'*"

"*'What made you quit?'*"

"*'It couldn't give me what I want.'*"

"*'What's that?'*"

"*'If your psychologists didn't find out, I won't tell them. That would make your job too easy.'*"

"*'Your mistake, Sibert. A live actor—even a poor one—is better than a dead adventurer. That's what you'll be if you try to set up something on your own. We've got you, Sibert—trapped in plastic, like that solidograph, and in measurements and film and ink. Wherever you try to hide, we'll dig you out. . . .'*"

"If you can find me, Locke," Sibert said to the mirror. "And you've lost me for the moment."

He raced down the fire stairs to the Main Street entrance, went through the dime stores, up the escalators, down the stairs, and out a side entrance onto Twelfth Street. As an east-bound bus pulled away from the stop, Sibert slid between the closing doors. A mile past City Hall, he got off,

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ran through two alleys, and swung into a cruising taxi.

"Head west. I'll tell you when to stop," he panted.

The cabby gave him a quick, sharp glance in the rear-view mirror, swung the creaky '94 Olds around on its forward wheel, and started west. In that glance, Sibert compared the man's features with the picture in the rear seat's plastic pocket. For whatever assurance it brought, they matched.

When he dismissed the taxi, he waited until it rolled out of sight before he turned north. The street was deserted; the sky was clear. He walked the five blocks briskly, feeling a sick excitement grow as the apartment buildings of Quality Towers grew tall in front of him.

He couldn't see the "Y" where the Kansas River flowed into the Missouri. Smoke from the industrialized Bottoms veiled the valley.

In the early days of the city, the bluff of Quality Hill had been a neighborhood of fine homes, but it had made the cycle of birth and death twice. As the city had grown out, the homes here had degenerated into slums. They had been razed to provide space for Quality Towers, but fifty years of neglect and lowering rents and irresponsible tenants had done their work.

It was time to begin again, but there would be no new beginning. A wave of smog drifted up over the bluff and sent Sibert into a fit of coughing.

Money was leaving the city. Those who could afford it were seeking a cleaner, healthier air and the better life in the suburbs, leaving the city to those who could not escape.

They could die together.

Sibert turned in the doorway and looked back the way he had come. There was no one behind him, no one visible for blocks. His eyes lifted to the hill rising beyond the trafficway. The only new construction in all the city was there.

Hospital Hill was becoming a great complex. In the midst of the general decay, it was shiny and new. It reached out and out to engulf the gray slums and convert them into fine, bright magnesium-and-glass walls, markets of health and life.

It would never stop until all the city was hospital. Life was all. Without it, everything was meaningless. The people would never stint medicine and the hospitals no matter what else was lost. And yet, in spite of the money contributed and the great advances of the science of health and life in the last century, it was becoming increasingly more expensive to stay as healthy as a man thought he ought to be.

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Perhaps some day it would take more than a man could earn. That was why men wanted Cartwright's children. That—and the unquenchable thirst for life, the unbearable fear of death—was why men hunted those fabulous creatures.

Men are like children, Sibert thought, afraid of the long dark. All of us.

He shivered and pushed quickly through the doorway.

The elevator was out of order as usual. Sibert climbed the stairs quickly. He stopped at the fifth floor for breath, thankful that he had to go no higher. Stair-climbing was dangerous, heart-straining work, even for a young man.

But what made his heart turn in his chest was the sight of the woman standing in front of a nearby door and the long, white envelope she held in her hands.

A moment later Sibert leaned past her and gently detached the envelope from her fingers. "This wasn't to be delivered until 6, Mrs. Gentry," he chided softly, "and it's only 5."

"I got a whole building to take care of," she complained in an offended whine. "I got more to do than run up and down stairs all day delivering messages. I was up here, so I was delivering it, like you said."

"If it hadn't been important I wouldn't have asked."

"Well"—the thin, old face grudgingly yielded a smile—"I'm sorry. No harm done."

"None. Good night, Mrs. Gentry."

As the landlady's footsteps faded down the uncarpeted, odorous hallway, lighted only by a single bulb over the stair well, he turned to study the name printed on the door: Barbara McFarland.

He added a mental classification: IMMORTAL.

The quick, sharp footsteps came toward the door and stopped. Fingers fumbled with locks. Sibert considered retreat and discarded the notion. The door opened.

"Eddy!" The girl's voice was soft, surprised, and pleased. "I didn't know you were back."

She was not beautiful, Sibert thought analytically. Her features were ordinary, her coloring neutral. With her mouse-brown hair and her light brown eyes, the kindest description was attractive. And yet she looked healthy, glowing. Even radiant. That was the word.

Or was that only a subjective reflection of his new knowledge?

"Bobs," he said fondly, and took her in his arms. "Just got in. Couldn't wait to see if you were all right."

"Silly," she said tremulously,

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seeming to enjoy the attention but showing a self-conscious necessity to minimize it. "What could happen to me?" She drew back a little, smiling up into his eyes.

His eyes dropped momentarily, then locked with hers. "I don't know, and I don't want to find out. Pack as much as you can get in one bag. We're leaving."

"I can't just pick up and walk out," she said quickly, her eyes puzzled. "What's the—?"

"If you love me, Bobs," he said in a low, tight voice, "you'll do as I ask and no questions. I'll be back in half an hour at the latest. I want you to be packed and ready. I'll explain everything then."

"All right, Eddy."

He rewarded her submission with a tender smile. "Get busy, then. Lock your door. Don't open it for anybody but me." He pushed her gently through the doorway and pulled the door shut between them and waited until he heard a bolt shot home.

His room was at the end of the hall. Inside, a tidal wave of weariness crashed over him. He let himself slump bonelessly into a chair, relaxing completely. Five minutes later he pulled himself upright and ripped open the letter he had retrieved from Mrs. Gentry. It began:

Dear Bobs:

If I am right—and you will not receive this letter unless I am—you are the object of the greatest manhunt ever undertaken in the history of the world.

. . .

He glanced through it hastily, ripped it to shreds, and burned them in the ashtray. As he crushed the ashes into irretrievable flecks, he sank into a chair in front of the desk, twisting a sheet of paper into the typewriter. His fingers danced over the keys; they flashed down with electronic speed:

Near this nation's capitol, in a seven-story bombproof building, is the headquarters of an organization which spends $100,000,000 a year and has not produced a single product of value. It has been spending for fifty years. It will continue for fifty more if it does not achieve its purpose before then.

It is hunting for something.

It is hunting for immortality.

If you have read this far, you are the third man besides the founders of this corporation to know the secret. Let it be a secret no more.

The organization is the National Research Institute. It is hunting for the children of Marshall Cartwright.

Why should Cartwright's children be worth a search that has already cost $5,000,000,000?

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Marshall Cartwright is immortal. It is believed that his children have inherited his immunity.

This fact alone would be unimportant were it not for the additional fact that the immunity factor is carried in the bloodstream. It is one of the gamma globulins which resist disease. Cartwright's body manufactures antibodies against death itself. His circulatory system is kept constantly rejuvenated; with abundant food, his remaining cells never die.

In the bloodstream—and blood can be transfused; gamma globulin can be injected. The result: new youth for the aged. Unfortunately, like all gamma globulins, these provide only a passive immunity which lasts only as long as the proteins remain in the bloodstream—30 to 40 days.

For a man to remain young forever, like Cartwright, he would need a transfusion from Cartwright every month. This might well be fatal to Cartwright. Certainly it would be unhealthful. And it would be necessary to imprison him to make certain that he was always available.

Fifty years ago, through an accidental transfusion, Cartwright learned of his immortality. He ran for his life. He changed his name. He hid. And it is believed that he obeyed the Biblical injunction to be fruitful and replenish the earth.

This was his safety; to spread his seed so widely that it could not be destroyed. This was his hope: that the human race might eventually become immortal.

In no other way could he hope to survive for more than a few centuries. Because he could be killed by accident or by man's greed. If he were ever discovered, his fate was certain.

Cartwright has disappeared completely, although his path has been traced up to twenty years ago. In the Institute office there is a map on which glows the haphazard wanderings of a fugitive from mankind's terrible fear of death. Agents have worked and reworked that path for children that Cartwright may have fathered.

If one is found, he will be bled —judiciously—but his primary function will be to father more children so that there will eventually be enough gamma globulin to rejuvenate almost fifty men.

Once there were one hundred. They were the wealthiest men in the world. Now over half of them have died, their estates going—by mutual arrangement—to the Institute for the search.

Already these men are exercising a vast influence over the governments of the world. They are afraid of nothing—except death.

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If they succeed, it will not matter if Man becomes immortal.

He will have nothing to live for.

Sibert read it over, making a few corrections, and grinned. He folded the sheets in half and then twice in the opposite direction. On a small envelope, he typed: I entrust this to you, your conscience and your honor, as a newspaperman. Do not open this envelope for thirty days. If I send for it before that time—verifying my request by repeating this message—I will expect you to return it unopened. I trust you.

He sealed the typewritten sheets inside the envelope. On a larger one, he typed: MANAGING EDITOR, KANSAS CITY STAR. . . ."

There was no use trusting public servants any more. It was not just that they could be bought, but that they were on the open market. Perhaps newspapers and their staffs could be bought, too, but they didn't usually go out looking for a purchaser.

He checked the tiny automatic to make sure that the chamber was full and the safety was off. He slipped it back into his jacket pocket. Cautiously he opened the door, inspected the dark hallway, and frowned. The single light over the stair well had gone out.

He slipped into the hall, the stamped envelope in his hand held under his jacket to shield the whiteness. At the top of the stairs he hesitated and then turned to the mail chute. He fished a coin out of his pocket and dropped it into the slot. For a few seconds, it clinked against the side of the chute as it fell.

The chute was clear. With a gesture of finality, Sibert shoved the letter through the slot.

"Insurance, Eddy?"

Sibert whirled, his hand thrust deep into his jacket pocket. Slowly he relaxed against the wall as a shadow detached itself from the shadows beside the stairs and moved toward him, resolving into a lean, dark-faced man with thin lips curling in a gently deprecatory smile.

"That's what it is, Les," Sibert said easily. "What are you doing up here?"

"Now, Eddy," Les protested mildly, "let's not play games. You know what I want. The kid, Eddy."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Les."

"Don't be cute, Eddy. Locke sent me. It's all over."

"How did you find me?"

"I never lost you. I'm your shadow, Eddy. Did you ever learn that poem when you were a kid:

I've got a little shadow
That goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him

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Is more than I can see?

Locke may be old, Eddy, but he ain't dumb. He's pretty cute, in fact. He knows all the tricks. You shouldn't oughta cross him, Eddy. Everybody's got a shadow. I got a shadow, too, I guess. I wonder who he is. I didn't have to follow you, Eddy. Locke let me know you were coming home. Now, Eddy, the kid. Where is he?"

So that was why Les had that front apartment on the first floor, Sibert thought ruefully. *And that was why he sat there hour after hour in the dark with his door ajar.* "You know better than that, Les. I can't tell you. I know too much."

"That's what Locke said," Les told him softly. "The kid's in the building, Eddy, we know that. Maybe right on this floor. You wouldn't let him get far away. And you'd hurry back to him, first thing. I'd like to make it easy on you, boy. But if you want us to do it the hard way—"

His lifting hand held a vest-pocket gun.

Sibert squeezed the automatic in his pocket. It exploded twice, thunderous in the uncarpeted hallway. Surprise blanked Les's bony face; pain twisted it as he leaned toward Sibert, his shoulders hunching, his gun hand coming down over his abdomen to hold in the pain. In grotesque slow motion, he folded forward

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onto the floor. He was dead.

Sibert was bringing his gun out, patting the tattered hole in his pocket to smother the flames, as a third shot shook the hall. Flame spurted down the stairs. The bullet flung Sibert back against the mail chute. His left hand clutched his chest as he triggered three quick shots toward the flash.

In the silence that followed, someone sighed. Like a sack of old bones, a body tumbled down the stairs from the landing above. It stopped at the bottom and leaned its head tiredly against the wall.

The wrinkled old face framed in gray hair was very dead. Through the pain, Sibert smiled at it. "What a delightful hostelry you keep, Mrs. Gentry," he said softly.

He started to chuckle but it turned into a fit of coughing. A pink froth stained his lips.

Someone was slapping him in the face. Someone kept saying, "Eddy! Eddy!" Over and over. His head weaved as he tried to get away, tried to force his eyes open.

Behind him was the mail chute. He was still leaning against it, but he felt disembodied, as if he were somewhere else receiving these odd sensations distantly, attenuated and distorted. He had blacked out for a moment, he thought feverishly. Give him a few minutes; he'd be all right.

"Eddy!" The voice was getting hysterical. "What's happened? You're bleeding!"

"Hello, Bobs," Sibert said weakly. "Funny thing—" He began to laugh, but it brought back the coughing. When the spell was over, his hand was freckled with blood. It sobered him. "You're—dangerous companion, Bobs," he panted. "Come on—got to get out of here."

He caught her arm and tried to start for the stairs. She held him back. "You're hurt. You need a doctor. We can't go anywhere until you've had medical attention. And these bodies—one of them is Mrs. Gentry—"

"Lovely woman, Mrs. Gentry," Sibert said wryly. "Especially dead. Shot me, she did. Come on, Bobs—no time. Explanations later. They're—after you!"

She let him pull her to the head of the stairs. There he sagged. She took his right hand and pulled it across her shoulders; she put her left arm around his waist. She was surprisingly strong. Together, his left hand clinging desperately to the hand rail, they descended the never-ending stairs, down and around and down, until, at last, the stairs ended and his knees buckled.

The broad first-floor hall was blurred like an old photograph. Sibert frowned, trying to bring

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it into focus, thinking: *this is what it is like to grow old, to have the senses fail, the muscles weaken, the living organs and functions of the body die within him. And finally, death.*

Someone was talking. Barbara again, trying to make him say something. "Where do we go now?" she kept saying.

He tried to think, but thought was torture. "Hide. Any place. Trust nobody. Everyone—against us."

And then there was no memory at all, only the irony that stayed with him, that edged his dreams about a young man who went hunting for life but found the dark companion instead.

He woke to a pearl-gray mustiness and thought it was dream. He was alone. His chest burned. He pressed it with his hand. When he brought it away, the hand was dark. He tried to make out the color in the dimness, but it was too difficult. It dripped unconsciousness into his eyes.

The second time was reality. This time he was sure. He was in a basement. He raised himself on one elbow, finding the strength in some hidden reservoir. Barbara knelt beside him. He was lying on a cot. Down a little farther, sitting on the cot, was a white-coated stranger. He had a hypodermic in his hand.

"Get away from me!" Sibert shouted hoarsely. "It's no use—"

Gently, Barbara pushed him back. "It's a doctor, Eddy. I got a doctor."

He lay back, feeling stronger, watching. Maybe the man was a doctor. Maybe he was something else, too. Everyone was suspect.

He sneaked his hand down his side, but the pocket was empty. The gun was gone.

The hypodermic was slipped back into its case, and the case was deposited in its slot in the black bag. That meant the injection had already been given, Sibert thought.

"I've done all I can," the doctor said sullenly. "I've patched the holes in his shoulder, but there's no way to patch the holes in his lung. Only time can do that and the proper care. I think it's too late now. The man's dying. It's a wonder to me he isn't in shock already."

"Would a transfusion help?" Barbara asked quietly.

"At this stage, I doubt it. No point in pouring water into a sieve. Besides, I've no blood with me. If you would let me get him to a hospital—"

"Use my blood."

"Impossible! There's no equipment here for typing and cross-matching, not to mention the unsanitary conditions—"

"I said, 'Use my blood.'" Barbara's voice was hard.

Sibert looked at her. She had a

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gun in her hand. His gun. It pointed unwaveringly at the doctor, Barbara's knuckles white where they gripped the handle.

The doctor frowned uncertainly. "What's your blood type?" he asked Sibert.

"O-negative," Sibert said. His voice seemed a long way off.

"Yours?" the doctor said, turning toward Barbara.

"What does it matter? If you don't use it, he dies anyway."

That was callous, Sibert thought vaguely. He had not suspected that Barbara could be so hard.

Silently the doctor removed a small, square box from his bag. *A fractionating machine,* Sibert thought. He brought out plastic tubing equipped with needles and fastened them to the box. . . .

"Whole blood," Barbara said, "not just the plasma!"

Things were getting distant. Sibert felt weak again and old and used up. He fought to stay conscious.

Barbara sank down beside the cot, the gun steady in her right hand. The basement was dark and dirty, littered with trash, from decades of neglect.

Dimly Sibert felt the doctor swab his arm and the distant pressure of the needle. But as the blood began to flow, he felt stronger. It was like liquid life.

"That's a pint," the doctor said.

"All right. Shut it off."

"I'll have to report this, you know. That's a gun-shot wound."

"It doesn't matter. We'll be gone by then."

"Try to move this man again, and he'll die of shock."

The voices were fading. He was going to sleep again, Sibert realized with dismay. He struggled against the rich, black tide, but it was hopeless.

Just before he went under, he saw the doctor turn his head to replace the equipment. A hand swept in front of Sibert's eyes. There was something metallic in it. It made a funny, hollow sound when it hit the doctor's head.

"Wake up, Eddy! You've got to wake up!"

The coolness came against his face again, soothing his fever. He stirred. A groan escaped him.

"You've got to get up, Eddy. We have to find another place to hide."

He worked his eyes open. Barbara's face was above him, her eyes wide and concerned, her face haggard.

She wiped his face again with a damp cloth. "Try, Eddy!" she urged. "We can't stay here much longer."

I'll die, he thought. *That's what the doctor said.* Then he remembered Locke and what he was fighting for.

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He tried to get up. After a few seconds of futile struggle, he slumped back, moaning. The second time, Barbara helped him. She slipped an arm under him. She lifted. He sat up, and the dark basement reeled, spun crazily around him.

A little later he was standing, although he couldn't remember how he got to his feet. His legs were miles away. He told them to move, but they were stubborn. He had to lift them one by one and put them down. Only Barbara beside him kept him upright.

Against the dark, old octopus that was an ancient, coal-fired, gravity furnace, the doctor was propped, his chin against his chest. "Dead?" Sibert asked. His voice sounded thin.

"Don't talk. He's drugged, that's all. They'll be looking for him soon. He was just leaving the hospital when I made him come with me. Nobody saw us, but they'll begin to suspect something when he doesn't show up for duty. I let you rest as long as I could, but now we've got to leave."

Somehow they reached the rickety steps that led upwards toward brightness. Beside him, holding him up, Barbara sobbed suddenly. "Eddy, Eddy! What are we going to do?"

Sibert called for strength, silently, and straightened his shoulders and scarcely leaned on her at all. "Come on, Bobs. We can't give up now."

"All right, Eddy." Her voice was stronger, firmer. "It's you they'll kill, isn't it, Eddy? Not me?"

"How do you . . . know?"

"You were out of your head. You were raving."

"Yeah." Painfully they climbed the shaky steps. The old wooden boards sagged dangerously as their weight came down upon them. "They'll kill me, all right. Not you. Not if they can help it."

As they came out into sunshine pitilessly revealing an aridity of cracked concrete heaped with refuse—ashes, old boards, tin cans, bottles, boxes—Sibert felt a sort of giddy strength. It came and went, like a slow pulse, leaving blank spots.

Suddenly they were past the clutter and into an alley. It held the sleek, molded beauty of a two-year-old Cadillac Turbojet 500. As he sagged against the polished side, Barbara slid the door open.

"Where'd you get it?" he asked weakly.

"Stole it."

"It's no good. Too bright. They'll pick us up."

"I don't think so. Anyway, there's no time to change. Get in the back. Curl up on the floor."

The car felt wonderfully cool

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against his hot body. He tried to think of an alternative, but his brain wouldn't work. He let Barbara help him into the car. He sagged gratefully to the floor. His chest felt sticky and hot; he was bleeding again.

There were suitcases in the back seat. Barbara stacked them over him carefully until he was completely hidden.

A single spot of sunlight filtered through. He watched it mindlessly as the car started and then moved away with the powerful acceleration of the 500-horsepower turbine. As the car moved, the spot of light jiggled and swayed. Sibert slept.

When he woke, the car was stopped and a harsh voice was saying, close to his ear, "Sorry, miss. My orders are to stop all cars leaving the city. We're looking for a wounded man. He's got someone with him."

They didn't know about Barbara, then, Sibert thought, or how badly he was injured. They were far behind.

Cold reason crept in. Optimism was foolish. They were powerful enough to command the aid of the police; discovery was only a few feet away. And they would know a great deal more as soon as the doctor recovered consciousness. It would have been wiser to kill him.

"Then I can't help you." Barbara's voice was brittle and bell-clear. "Wounded men are not my specialty. I like them like you, officer—strong and able. But," she added carelessly, "you can look if you want to."

The policeman chucked. "Don't tempt me. You're not hiding him under your skirt, I bet. And there's not much else in this buggy but engine. What'll she do on a straightaway?"

"I've had her up to two hundred myself," Barbara said casually.

"I don't believe it." There was awe in his voice.

"Watch this!"

The car took off like a rocket. In a few seconds the tires began to hum. Sibert felt the car lighten as air rushing past the stubby, winglike stabilizer fins gave them lift. The acceleration continued long past the time he was sure it would stop.

Was it going to be that easy? he thought.

The acceleration eased. They cruised along, wheels whining. It made a kind of lullaby that sang Sibert back to sleep.

He woke with a start that hurt his chest. The car had stopped again, and the whine was gone.

For the second time, he thought: *I'm going to die.* The doctor had said so. With a clarity he had not known since the bullet had hit him, he thought: *Mrs. Gentry's bullet went*

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through a lung. I'm bleeding to death inside. Every movement makes it more certain.

He felt a petulant anger at Barbara, who held his life so lightly, who cared so little if he lived or died, who made him stagger blindly in search of a hiding place, dying on his feet.

Prompt medical attention could have saved him. That's what the doctor had implied.

She had given him blood, true. But what was one pint of blood when the thick, red life fluid was leaking from him so persistently, so inevitably. Even the blood of an immortal.

Futile anger rose higher. *Damn her!* he thought. *I am dying, and she will live forever.*

Dying was a strange thing, much like birth, filled with long drowsings and gray, half-conscious awakenings. Each time the grayness lifted for a moment, Sibert was surprised that he was still alive. The remnants of life drifted away in a long doze, until at last he came finally, completely, to full, cool wakefulness.

Gray light drifted through a dusty window pane and lay across the many-colored squares of the heavy comforter that pressed down on him. *I am going to live,* he thought.

He turned his head. Barbara was asleep in a heavy chair beside his bed. Its old upholstery was ripped and torn; stuffing had pushed through, gray and ugly.

Like Barbara. She was asleep. Her face was haggard with fatigue and unattractive. Her clothing was wrinkled and dirty. Sibert disliked looking at her. He would have looked away, but her eyes opened. Sibert smiled.

"You're better," she said huskily. Her hand touched his forehead. "The fever's gone. You're going to get well."

"I think you're right," he said weakly. "Thanks to you. How long?"

She understood. "A week. Go back to sleep now."

He nodded and closed his eyes and fell into a deep, dark, refreshing pool. The next time he woke, there was food, a rich chicken broth that went down smoothly and warmly. With it went strength.

There was strength for more talk.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"An old dirt farm. Abandoned ten years or more, I imagine." She had found time to wash and change her clothing for a dress she must have discovered in a closet; it was old, but at least it was clean. "Hydroponics probably drove the farmer out of business. This road's pretty deserted. I don't think anyone saw me drive in. I hid the car in the barn. There's chickens nesting there—half wild but not too

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bright. Who were those people you shot?"

"Later," he said. "First—do you remember your father?"

She shook her head puzzledly. "I didn't have a father. Not a real father. Does that matter?"

"Not to me. Didn't your mother tell you anything about him?"

"Not much. She died when I was ten."

"Then why did you insist that the doctor use your blood for the transfusion?"

Barbara studied the old wooden floor for a moment. When she looked back at Sibert, her light-brown eyes were steady. "One thing my mother told me—she made me promise never to tell anyone. It seemed terribly important."

Sibert smiled gently. "You don't have to tell me."

"I want to," she said quickly. "That's what love is, isn't it—wanting to share everything, to keep nothing back?" She smiled shyly. "It was my legacy, my mother said. What my father had given me. His blood. There was a kind of magic to it which would keep me young, which would never let me grow old. If I gave it to anyone, it would help them grow well again or young again. But if I ever told anyone or let anyone take a sample of my blood—the magic might go away."

Sibert's smile broadened.

"You're laughing at me," she said, withdrawing. "You're thinking that it was only a little girl's make-believe or that my mother wasn't quite sane."

"No, no."

"Maybe it was make-believe," she said softly, her eyes distant. "Maybe it was only to keep a plain little girl from crying because she was not beautiful, because no one wanted to play with her. Maybe it was meant to convince her that she was really a princess in disguise, that under the ugly duckling was a beautiful swan. I believed it then. And when you were dying I believed in it again, I wanted to believe that I had this power to save you, that the magic was real."

"Your mother was right," Sibert said sleepily. "You are a princess, a swan. The magic is real. Next time. . . ."

Next time there was the white meat of chicken for Sibert to eat with broth that had egg drops cooked in it. He sat up for a little. There was only a twinge of pain in his chest and a muscular ache in his shoulder.

It tired him quickly, and he sank back to his pillow after a few minutes. "Your mother was right," he repeated. "Not in any fairy tale sense. In a real, practical way, you have new blood, whose immunity factors—the gamma globulins—can repel cellular degeneration as if death itself were a disease."

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He told her the story of Marshall Cartwright, the fabulous creature who had gone secretly about the country to father an immortal race. He told her about the Institute and the men who had founded it and its purpose. He told her that he had been an unwitting part of it until he had found, by accident, what all the rest had been looking for.

"How did you find me?" she asked, her face pale.

"I was going through some old medical records, doctor's notes, case histories, that sort of thing. One of them was for a maternity case: Janice McFarland, unmarried. She had given birth to a daughter, Barbara. She needed blood; she was dying. The attending physician was a Dr. Russell Pearce. He must have known your father."

"Why?"

"I found this note stuck to the back of one of the lab reports: 'Baby fine but mother dying. Contact Cartwright: Only chance.'"

"That seems like such a small thing."

"When I forced the information out of Locke, I knew I was right. It all fitted together."

"You had traced me before then," she said.

"Yes," he said quietly, "but a funny thing happened: I fell in love with the girl I was searching for."

Her face changed. "Oh, thank God!" she said prayerfully. "For a little while I was afraid—"

"That I was a vampire, interested only in your blood?" Sibert shook his head chidingly. "Bobs! Bobs!"

"I'm sorry." She squeezed his hand repentantly. "Then you came back for me," she prompted.

"Les—that's the only name I knew him by—was waiting for me, watching from his first floor apartment. And Mrs. Gentry was watching him, probably without knowing what his job was."

"Then he was going to shoot you because you wouldn't tell him my name," Barbara asked.

"No, not that. He knew I wouldn't tell. The shooting was to silence me quickly. As soon as I came directly back to the apartment building, they were sure they could find you. But I shot first. Mrs. Gentry shot me and was killed when I fired back. You know the rest."

"The rest?" Slowly she smiled; her radiance seemed to brighten the room. "The rest will make up for all we have suffered. It will be so beautiful, Eddy—so lovely it seems impossible and unreal. If what you say is true, I'll never die, and I will keep you young, and we will be together forever."

"If it were only that simple," he sighed.

(Continued on page 120)

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Baron Olivier was bored at his daughter's wedding feast. He called for more dangerous, spectacular events which amused the guests and provided . . .

A Diversion For The Baron

By ARTHUR PORGES

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ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

IN THE great vaulted hall of the castle the wedding feast was drawing to a close. The famous jongleur, brought all the way from Chalons, was just singing in his reedy, quavering voice the last verses of "Tristan and Ysolt."

Baron Olivier, the host, had his mind less on this dramatic chanting than on the difficult problem of siegecraft soon to be faced; but his wife, Adela, was sobbing openly at the fate of the lovers, as were a score of other noble dames. His daughter, ostentatiously demure, had eyes only for her husband.

Earlier a huge, smoking pasty, four feet in diameter, had been slashed open to release a dozen terrified songbirds. As the company cooed their delight, the baron had made a sign, and from strategic positions about the hall, his grinning falconers had unhooded eight well-trained hawks. These fierce predators destroyed the songbirds in a few moments, tearing them in flight. Tiny feathers drifted erratically through the air, to be snatched at with much laughter by knights and their ladies. Little flecks of blood appeared suddenly on silks and furs.

But now, as the jongleur's final notes died away, the baron stirred in his high-backed chair. It was time again, he felt, for a more vulgar diversion. Perhaps it would be necessary to recall the tumblers,—"Brise-Tete," and "Tue-Boef." They were not first rank performers; but the castle of St. Gervais was just inaccessible enough to have small attraction for the more famous entertainers of the realm, who were (he reflected sourly) becoming almost as proud as noblemen these days.

At that moment his first squire, Aimery, approached and whispered in his ear. The baron's heavy eyebrows rose.

"Maitre Denis!" he snorted. "What can that old fool do to please my guests?"

"He claims, Messire, to have

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discovered an unknown substance capable of many strange things. If it seems good to try him . . ."

"Oh, very well," Olivier growled, wishing the whole affair were done with so that he could think about reducing the castle of Chenevert, held by his blood enemy, the Count de Bernon. "His antics are diverting whether or not his alchemy."

He watched moodily as the square left to return leading a bony old man wearing a rusty black pelisson trimmed with mangy fur. Olivier, with some amusement, recognized this as a cast-off of his, and wondered how it had descended to its present owner. Maitre Denis was the castle clerk, but his real love was alchemy. He wore the shabby cloak with an air of importance; no doubt he was swelling like a frog at this opportunity to shine before high-born visitors. Normally he had little enough chance to distinguish himself, since this was not a region that honored scholars.

"Noble guests," he announced shakily, "my gracious master, Baron Olivier, has ordered me to demonstrate for your pleasure a remarkable dust of which I alone know the secret. I beg of you not to crowd close, as this powder of mine can be hurtful to rich garments."

He gestured, obviously imitating the baron's imperious motion, and a varlet came forward bearing a leaden coffer no larger than a man's head. This he placed on the stone flagging at the alchemist's feet, first clearing away the fresh reeds that littered it. Maitre Denis opened the little chest, and the nearer guests could see that it was half full of a gritty, dark gray powder. Savoring this attention, the old man took from somewhere inside his robe a cylinder of wood, made apparently from a section of hollow reed. He removed a stopper of clay from the top, and displayed the container in a single sweeping motion.

"I shall now put some of my potent dust into this vessel," he said, his voice resonant with growing confidence. Using a small wooden scoop, he poured a trickle of the blackish mixture into the reed, replaced the clay plug, tamping it firmly, and with a bit of straw taken from the floor, made a hole in the center of the stopper. After placing the charged cylinder on a flagstone, he took a tiny pinch of the powder and sprinkled it over the punctured clay plug. The guests watched with increasing interest, and the castle menials stood unobtrusively along the walls. Maitre Denis muttered something to the var-

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let, who hurried away, returning in a moment with a small torch, lit from one of the tall flambeaux socketed about the hall.

"Behold!" the alchemist cried, as stepping back several paces, he thrust the torch out the full length of his arm until it neared the powder-strewn plug that sealed the reed vessel.

There was a crisp detonation, and before their astonished gaze the wooden container disintegrated in a shower of smoky sparks. The guests laughed and applauded. Truly, the old man's powder was novel stuff. Not even in Paris could one see a thing like that. In one corner Father Gregoire stared, his lips narrowed. The priest's face, plump, yet somehow ascetic, was blank with thought, as if his imagination was groping for something elusive.

Delighted with their approbation, and seeming to grow taller, Maitre Denis proceeded to a second demonstration. Taking a whole fistful of the powder, he dexterously laid it out in a complex, looping trail along the stone floor. Before the audience could grasp the significance of the intricate convolutions, he snatched the torch from the varlet and applied it to one end of the design. The guests exclaimed in wonder as the grayish dust, flaring and sputtering, outlined in flame the baron's coat-of-arms. And the more slow-witted observers, who missed the point at first, were able to grasp it more firmly when the combustion ceased, and the familiar rampant lion was there, etched in black, on the pale stone. They all roared approval, and the baron himself flushed with pleasure. There was more to the old man than he suspected; a gold coin flashed through the air, and the alchemist louted low in appreciation of his master's generosity.

But the alchemist had not yet reached the zenith of his performance. What came now was to him, at least, a triumph of ingenuity and imagination. He drew a thick tube of leather from his clothes. It was carefully reinforced with windings of raw flax, and one end closed by doubling the material and binding it tight. Maitre Denis put a cautiously calculated scoop of powder into the tube, and sent the varlet scurrying again. Panting, the fellow returned with a pair of fire-tongs, and a small wooden bench, which he propped on end against one wall.

The old man rummaged in the lead coffer, drawing a little linen bag from the powder, where it lay buried. He took from this sack a single crudely spherical metal ball, the size of

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a walnut. This he dropped into the open end of the tube, ramming it home with a straight stick. The fine crowsfeet around his rheumy eyes deepened with joyous anticipation as he made final arrangements. Advancing to a position about six yards from the up-ended bench, he gripped the leather cylinder firmly in the metal tongs; and taking a torch from the varlet, touched it gingerly to an opening in the base of the tube. Immediately a narrow, hissing stream of fire lanced from the rear pinhole. Simultaneously there was a sharp rap against the bench. Dropping the tongs, the alchemist skipped nimbly to the wall, pointing with one long-nailed finger to the lead sphere imbedded for half its diameter in the tough oak. He smirked with glee at the guests' murmur of awe. Father Gregoire raised his eyes to heaven, a queer look of exaltation on his face.

Erect in the great carved chair, the baron stiffened, and a drop of blood suddenly stained the full, purplish underlip that showed through his spiky beard. He had nipped it with his strong teeth. Maitre Denis was withdrawing now, all bows and smiles, when the baron's arrogant voice stopped him dead.

"A moment, if you please, fellow."

The old man froze in his tracks, oblivious even to the small coins raining about him.

"Messire?" he quavered.

"When did you discover this powder?"

"Scarcely a fortnight ago, my lord."

The baron leaned forward in his chair.

"Does anybody else share its secret? Think well before you speak. Your wife? Children? The men-at-arms? The varlets?"

"Nay," Maitre Denis declared. "I was not minded to tell it so easily. It took many brewings to make the basic elements. And my wife, Sire, knows naught but domestic skills, being unable to distinguish earth from air, or fire from water. Be assured, my lord, the secret is mine alone."

Olivier's fierce eyes shone.

"Good! It occurs to me that there are possibilities in your discovery that you do not dream of. You shall tell me how the stuff is made, and I will reward you well."

The old man reddened with pleasure.

"Gladly, Messire. You take of brimstone three measures—"

"Not here, fool!" the baron interrupted, furious. Then he composed himself, grinning crookedly at his guests. "Your pardon, my friends, but this is hardly the place for such disclosures." He turned back to the alchemist,

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who was edging away. "Wait; I have not given you leave to go. This being my only daughter's wedding feast, I have in mind an even better diversion with your strange powder. Squire Aimery!" The boy leaped forward, and the baron gave him some low-voiced commands. As the squire trotted off, Olivier stared thoughtfully at the old man, who squirmed uneasily under the Baron's threatening and smouldering gaze.

"Is that all the powder you have?"

"All at the moment, Messire. But I can prepare more in a few days."

"No matter. What you have might suffice for my own little demonstration. After that, you shall have many men to help you. Ah, here is Aimery."

The squire had returned, staggering under an unusual load. It was a model, made by mortaring heavy pebbles together, of a castle—that of Chenevert. A masterpiece of some humble artisan, it displayed in perfect proportions all the features of De Bernon's fortress: walls, towers, donjon, barbican, and palais. By studying the model, Olivier had hoped to find some sure way of reducing the castle of his old enemy. To date, he had been unsuccessful, but now things would change.

At a crisp wave of the baron's jewelled fingers, the squire, grunting, deposited the weighty thing on the floor, using the space cleared of reeds by the alchemist's performance.

Forgetting his guests completely for the moment, Baron Olivier looked down at the miniature stronghold, seeing in imagination the mighty pile of Chenevert. His heavy maxillaries knotted, and a ferocious glint appeared in his dark, wide-set eyes.

Suddenly he remembered his duty as host, for the whole company was watching him in silent wonder. He smiled at them reassuringly.

"Now, Maitre Denis," he cried, boyishly eager. "Let us see if your magic dust can shatter this doll-fortress for me."

The old man gaped at his master, bewildered; and the baron prodded him in sharp tones.

"Come, fellow; you heard!"

"But, Messire," the alchemist stammered. "This model is so strong and heavy, not a wooden reed. My powder can't—"

"Why not?" Olivier snapped. "Use more of it. How much is needed?"

"I know not. I have never used more than a few pinches. The castle is very solidly built, and—"

"Enough!" The baron, like all his class, was intolerant of re-

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sistance. "Put the whole coffer beside it. Thus we have a container to give more strength to the powder, even as did your little reed. It opposes confinement; is that not so? When free, it only burned. A strange stuff, indeed."

"But, my lord—"

"Maitre Denis," Olivier thundered. "You are keeping my noble guests waiting."

With trembling hands the alchemist placed the box of powder alongside the model.

"No," the baron objected. "Can you not see, old fool, that it must be inside, by the donjon, so that no force is spent outside the walls?"

The clerk obeyed, wedging the chest in place. He looked up to meet his master's cold gaze, and nervously beckoned to the varlet, who fetched him a dagger. With its point Maitre Denis made a hole in the lid of the coffer, and as the baron nodded grim approval, spread some grains of powder about the opening. The varlet, grinning idiotically, handed him a torch; but the old man peered about, acutely dismayed.

"Messire," he pleaded, "a longer torch is needful here. It is unwise to stand so close—"

Impatiently the baron said: "Put the fire to it, fellow. There's not enough to do any harm. Very likely it will but pop and split like the reed. I shall need a whole hogshead full for even a small tower of stone, but even so . . ." He broke off, rubbing his palms. The Count de Bernon was due for an unpleasant shock before long, he thought. And with de Bernon crushed, Olivier would control a whole province.

By now Maitre Denis had exchanged his short-handled torch for one a good five feet in length, and under his master's chill surveillance dared not hesitate longer. The flaming pole quivered in his skinny, agued arm; it oscillated nearer the powder . . .

A shattering roar seemed to rock the immense, high-ceilinged chamber. Women screamed, and there were deep-throated cries from the men. A great oriflamme of faded crimson samite fell from some point high among the smoke-blackened beams where it had rested for generations. It made a splotch of color on the cluttered floor.

The baron shrank back in his chair, deathly pale, his jaw slack. "Mordieu!" he muttered, shaken. For a moment all he saw was the ruined model, its towers truncated, its walls in fragments. Then he uttered a second fervent oath. Maitre Denis lay crumpled face down only a few feet from the wrecked castle, his pelisson smoldering.

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The varlet ran to him, and then turned the old man over. One side of his head was crushed to a crimson jelly laced with grayish brain matter. A gory pebble, rough with mortar, lay by one ear. The alchemist was dead. Father Gregoire, who seemed fascinated by the blasted model, saw this a little later than the others. With a stricken look he came forward to begin the sad duties of his office.

"The worst of ill fortune!" Baron Olivier was raving, some hours later. "None of his dunghill friends know the secret. Not even the start! Lost—all lost! With that powder I could have leveled Chenevert and ruled a province. You saw, Father? What power even in that little coffer!"

The priest eyed him, his own face sad.

"I, too, lament the loss of that secret," he said. "I pray that it may soon be recovered."

"You!" the baron exclaimed. "But you and the bishop are always chiding me for engaging in battle. Ah!" he added, his face brightening. "You are thinking of the pagans. With that powder we could wrest the Holy Sepulchre from the infidels forever."

"No," was the sober reply. "I had no thought of the pagans." He gazed directly at Olivier. "Messire, in a few months the Thirteenth Century will be upon us. Christ died in our behalf on the cross 1,200 years ago; and yet Christians murder one another daily for worldly gain. Think you that is His way?"

The baron frowned uneasily.

"I must defend my fief," he protested. "If the others preferred peace, so would I. Yet if de Bernon continues to gain power, he will crush me, save I strike first. That is the way of the world. So it must always be. As for the powder, I cannot see how it concerns the church, nor why you wish it re-discovered."

"It is my conviction," Father Gregoire said, his eyes melancholy caverns of compassion, "that God will soon enable us to make it again. It will be His method of establishing a reign of peace on earth. No fortress can stand before the alchemist's dust; nor could any armor ever forged resist the blow of a lead ball weighing several ounces, when propelled by that strange fire from a tube. No, Messire, once the black powder is known all over the world, that will be the end of war."

THE END

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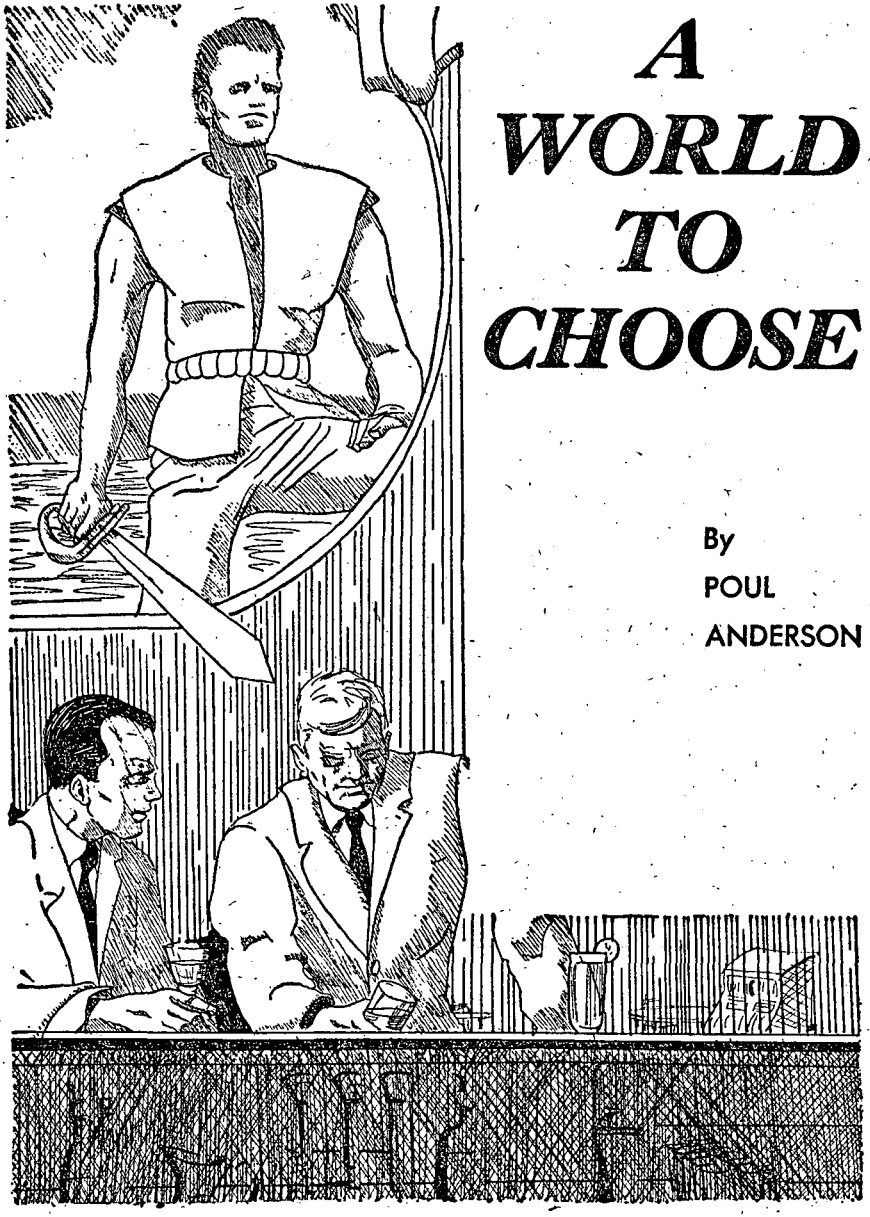

A WORLD TO CHOOSE

By POUL ANDERSON

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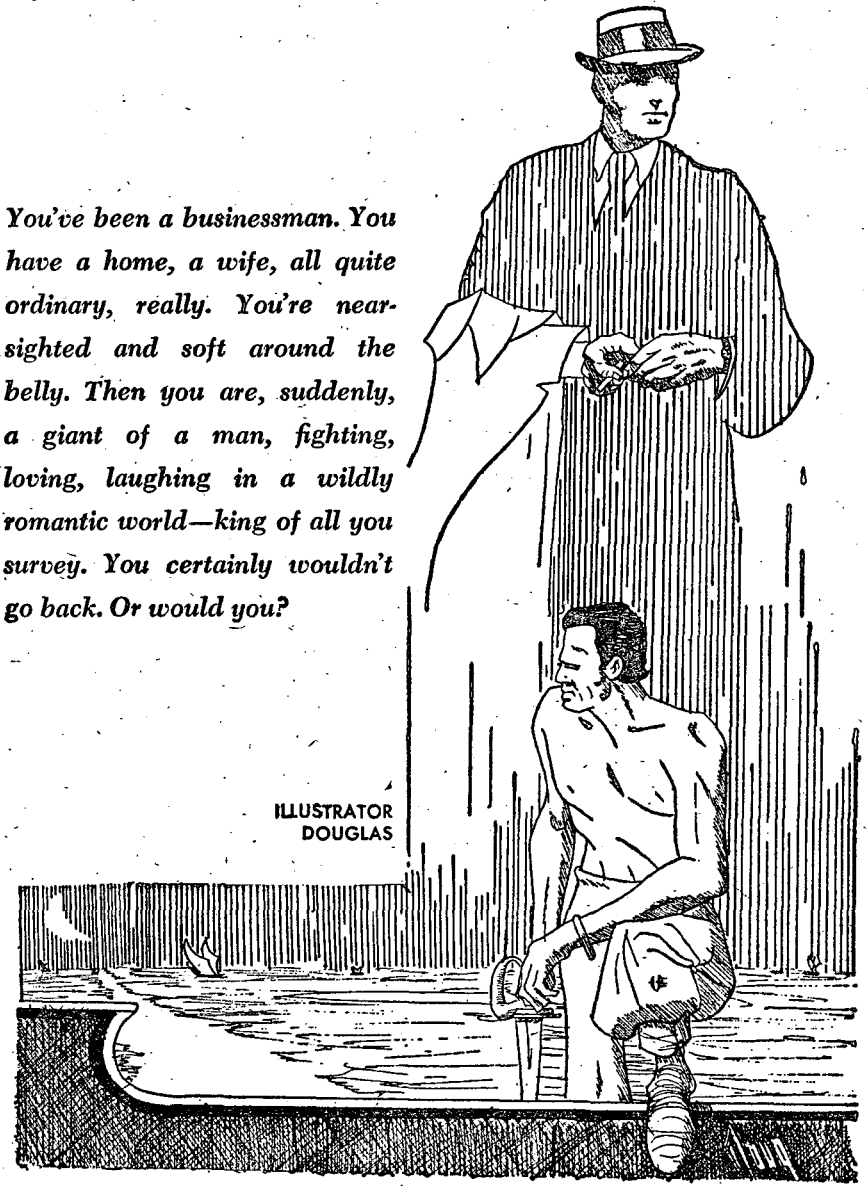
You've been a businessman. You have a home, a wife, all quite ordinary, really. You're near-sighted and soft around the belly. Then you are, suddenly, a giant of a man, fighting, loving, laughing in a wildly romantic world—king of all you survey. You certainly wouldn't go back. Or would you?

ILLUSTRATOR DOUGLAS



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NO, said the little man, "that's one thing I never did find out. Perhaps I could have asked Her, but at those times—in that presence—and with so much else to think about, you know, so much strangeness. . . ." He stared at his empty glass. I remembered it was my turn to buy and signalled the waiter. The bar was dimly lit, but not very busy at this hour, so he came over at once.

"Two more," I said.

"Gosh!" My companion started. He'd not been hinting at all, had merely lost himself in reverie. (Unless he was a consummate actor. But that didn't square with his bespectacled, gray-suited ordinariness.) "I'd better not. My wife'll be meeting me here. I told you that, didn't I? She's shopping today. That's why I didn't go straight home when it turned out I could quit early. Came in here to wait, and—I really shouldn't. I don't have the capacity I once did."

"Oh, another won't hurt you, Mr. Greenough," I urged. Of course I didn't believe his fantasy, but I wanted to hear it out. In a long succession of garrulous tavern acquaintances, encountered once and never again, he was unique. He gave in without a struggle.

"You were saying," I reminded him, "you don't know where this other world lies."

"*When* might be a better word," he answered. "I'm positive it wasn't simply another planet. The moon and stars were the same as here . . . people . . . most of the animals, if not all. To be sure, the laws of nature appeared somewhat different. Magic did work, within limits. But then, perhaps the Warlocks had discovered principles —action at a distance, similarity, or something—real laws that our physicists haven't come across."

"You mean this might have been our own world, but far in the future?"

"Or the past. I don't suppose archeologists know every civilization which has risen and died in a hundred thousand years. . . . And yet, in a long time, wouldn't the constellations change? They hadn't. I've stood in the prow of the *Dragon*, with the rigging creaking behind me and a kraken rising far out across moonlit waves, and seen the same Great Bear turning around the Pole Star that I've watched from my own suburban back yard."

He took out a cigaret. I lit it for him. "I suppose one of those parallel-universes concepts fits best," he decided. "But I'm not certain. Neither Carl Greenough nor Kendrith of Narr were ever much good at mathematics."

"Then you never knew what the Goddess was, either?"

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"Oh, heavens, no. I don't want to. Still don't. She was the Goddess, that's all. If you'd like to speculate about some lonely and beautiful and ultimately evolved being, come from elsewhere to live in that blue cave and give our race as much of Her wisdom as we could stand to have . . . go ahead. You'd need to be in the presence itself before you could really see what a meaningless noise any such 'explanation' is."

He didn't have the air of a religious crank, though love was in his tones. Therefore I ventured to suggest that She treated humans rather cavalierly. Not just interchanging two men's minds, across time or space or might-have-been, though that was bad enough. But making poor Greenough, trapped in a pirate's body, fight and suffer and come close to death, again and again, for a cause which was not his own.

He didn't see it that way. "The cause was Hers," he said.

The waiter brought our drinks. I raised my glass. "Here's to you," I said. "Uh, let's leave off theorizing and get back to the story. For two years, you say, Kendrith's pirates fought along with Emperor Oterron, because Kendrith said to and they didn't know another mind was using their chief's body. But what was Kendrith himself, in Greenough's body, here in this world, what was he doing all the while?"

He shrugged. "Being Carl Greenough. Remember, the mind . . . ego . . whatever you call it . . . isn't separate from the physical nerves and flesh. It's a function of them. What the Goddess replaced was something very subtle. Each of us had full command of the other's language, reflexes, habits, skills. Actual memories of the other's past were blurred and incomplete, but as time went on they improved. Even initially, we could pass muster, claiming a blow on the head had addled our wits a trifle." He grinned. "And being an up-and-coming New York publisher does call for much the same temperament as being a buccaneer from Narr."

"Toughest on Kendrith, in a way," I said. "He could only wait. If Oterron's war was won, and the pirate boss hadn't gotten killed in the process, the Goddess would put the two minds back in their rightful places. Otherwise—" I stopped. After all, I thought, Kendrith would be alive, though captive in this world. And from Greenough's account, he was a roughneck without close emotional ties.

How must it have been for Greenough himself, waging war among strangers, knowing his wife was living with his body unaware his soul was not therein?

Whoa! At this rate I'd soon believe the yarn!

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"Go on," I said hastily. "After two years, you've related, the usurper and his remaining men were beaten back to a single island. What then?"

"It was vital to capture that stronghold," he replied. "As long as Roches held fast, the revolt might break out all over again, for numerous barons in the Empire were still Muntarists. Or his distant relative, the Khan of Barjad, might come riding in from beyond the mountains to help. We knew Roches had one first-class Warlock in his employ, old Yamáz, who could turn air into food and fuel and ammunition. Thus we had no hope of starving them into surrender. Yamaz could also turn himself into a condor and fly out across the Empire, stirring up trouble. We had no comparable adept on our side. (Should I say 'we'? Well, I guess I've been doing it along. May as well continue. The Kendrith body was on Oterron's side, and I naturally tend to think—Anyhow.) You see, then, in spite of the fact that by now Oterron's followers much outnumbered those of Roches, the contest still looked fairly equal. Every day, Roches' daughter Faimma used to walk on the castle walls and taunt us. Her hair blew like fire in the wind. God, she was beautiful! I think thousands of the Portula and Sontundar men who first supported Roches, when he overthrew Oterron and seized the crown, I think they did it—against all their own best interests—because Fiamma had smiled on them. But us she mocked. . . ."

Greenough climbed to the crow's nest to watch the attack. From there, atop the *Dragon's* mainmast, he could look far across blue waters. They glittered and danced under the westering sun; warm airs ruffled the long yellow hair in which Kendrith of Narr had taken such pride. But sharply before him stood the image of a northern ocean, green and unrestful, beneath a pine-topped cliff down which the River Oush hurled itself in a thousand-foot leap.

Now cut that out! he told himself. *You never saw Narr. Kendrith did. It's his homeland, and his memories making you homesick, because his body has been so many years down here along the Chabarro coast. If you must get maudlin, then wonder how Ellen's rosebushes are doing in Westchester County.*

He tried to summon his wife's face, for comfort, but found himself too preoccupied. He remembered her eyes and hair were brown, but he couldn't really see them. Perversely, the full-blown recollection of Unia popped into his consciousness and wouldn't go away. She was no one—the

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latest of many giggling tavern wenches, meek slave girls, tattooed barbarian lasses, for Carl Greenough had not long remained able to deny the needs of Kendrith's vigorous flesh—but his mind insisted on recalling her in plump and playful detail. Maybe only as a defense against the disturbing lean loveliness of Fiamma.

Trumpets jolted him back to immediacy. There followed a great snapping of catapults, and the gliders lifted.

Their formation was good. In the course of the past two years, a skilled corps of pilots and paratroopers had developed from Greenough-Kendrith's original suggestion, and had done heroic service. But if they could take this island of Tabirra, all else they had accomplished would seem as nothing.

Certainly the amphibious tactics which Greenough had also supplied from his foreign background, and which had enabled the rightful Emperor to recapture the Duchy of Portula . . . certainly they wouldn't work here. Nor would methods more traditional in this world. Greenough focused his telescope with sweating hands.

Like skeletal birds, the gliders soared up. Ships and ships and ships lay below them, the besieging fleet at anchor, sailors of the Empire come to avenge the years of Roche's misrule, volunteers from a dozen lesser nations come to avenge his slaving raids upon them. Not only square-riggers like the gold-trimmed four-master of Oterron himself, or the oar-powered "aircraft carriers" built to Greenough's order, or the double-ended schooners of the Northland pirates who followed Kendrith were there. Galleons, dhows, feluccas, caravels, catamarans raked the sky with their spars and burdened the water with their hulls. The low sun burned off cannon gaping from gun ports and off pikes crowding the decks, off banners and armor and eyes. The gliders swirled high and lined out toward the island.

"Get 'em!" Greenough heard himself mutter, between teeth clenched so tight that his jaws hurt. "Go get 'em, lads! Cast 'em down into Ginnungagap!"

Was it the waiting that chilled him? Those were his men—some of them pirates, some Imperials, some allies, but all of them trained and sworn at and fought beside, for two wild years—Kendrith's flying tigers, by the Goddess! If something happened to them, while he must sit here with sword in sheath. . . . He remembered how young Iro had talked, on nights when the sea was phosphorescent and the ship walked through cool wet fire. After the war, Iro said, he was

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going to outfit a squadron and sail due west across the ocean. For if the world was round, as all modern philosophers agreed, then new lands and limitless adventure must lie on the farther shore. Why wouldn't Kendrith come too, as admiral? Iro worshipped the big Northling more ardently than he did the Goddess Herself. . . . But Iro hunched in a shell of cloth and bamboo, nearing Tabirra's sharp towers, while Kendrith must wait.

No, his shiver was more than excitement. The air was turning cold, darkening, as the wind rose. A haze in the east thickened unnaturally fast to blue-black cloud masses, where lightning crawled. An aurora shimmered green about the castle.

"Yamaz." he said: a curse.

But Lady, Lady, who could have known the Warlock also had power over storm?" He had saved it for his final test, and now— "Come back, you idiots!" Greenough roared futilely at his gliders. "Get back down! You can't make it!"

A few managed a return to the nearest flattop. Most ditched in the sea, where the waves chopped them up but the men swam around until boats could rescue them. Some, Greenough saw dashed to flinders against the island cliffs; and some fell into the surf below, where no man could live. Two landed crippled within the castle walls. It was not good to think of what Roches' garrison did to their crews.

Carl Greenough's eyes stung and blurred. But Kendrith was more used to death, and Kendrith's nerves and glands powered this body's emotions. Even before the aerial disaster was complete, the pirate chief swarmed down the shrouds to the deck.

Gray-bearded, peg-legged Wolden, who was still the toughest man with a battle ax in all this fleet, stumped over to him. Both were simply clad, wearing little more than their weapons and kilts. There would be time enough to don ringmail and conical helmet when fighting broke out. The mate flung a mantle across his captain's shoulders, for the wind was now cold on the skin, loud in the rigging. The sun was not yet down, but already night came boiling from the east.

"What next, skipper?" asked Wolden through the noise.

Greenough rubbed his jaw. Kendrith had adopted the Southland custom of shaving: an exotic ornamentation, like the golden wristlets and silken robes looted from Chabarroan ports, in the years before he had suddenly decreed the pirates would make alliance with exiled Emperor Oterron. The first anger and despair were leaving him and

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a scheme which he had regarded as a desperation measure began to appear more attractive. Greenough was horrified at its recklessness, or should have been, but Kendrith's slam-bang habits were too strong. He found himself looking forward to the attempt. If they carried it off—what a gorgeous exploit! The balladeers would be singing of it a thousand years hence.

"We'll have a go at the gate, the way we once talked about," he said.

"Huh? You serious?" Wolden's battered face, his whole shaggy body, registered dismay. "It's madness, skipper. Plain, scuppered madness. I got a responsibility—my family's been attending yours since the gods first moved north—I can't let you do any such thing till you beget a proper heir. No, sir, I can't."

"You damn well can. Now go find me some volunteers. Don't tell 'em anything except that it's dangerous and they'll need to be uncommon good swimmers. The Goddess only knows what that old bastard Yamaz can do in the way of eavesdropping."

"Oh, I'll get the men, all right," said Wolden. "About forty, d' you think? But you're not going. Bad enough to risk your neck hellraising halfway across the world, but this—! No, sir, you stay here, same as when the gliders went up."

"That was different," said Greenough. "That was only to be part of an operation. The rest of the fleet would've moved in and attacked the gate while the paratroopers kept the garrison busy, and then I'd have been useful. But under the new plan, the swimmers will *be* the operation, damn near. I'm not going to let my men be chopped into fishbait while I sit here swilling ale."

Or did Greenough speak? Quixotry was more natural to Kendrith's people than to twentieth-century Americans. It felt resoundingly good, too: to Kendrith!

"If you only had an heir," pleaded Wolden. "I don't mean your ordinary by-blow, you must have hundreds but none could rule Bua after you. The yeomen wouldn't accept a base-born's judgments. They want a son by a properly wedded wife, of high enough standing to do the Bua men honor."

"Shut up!" Greenough dismissed the mate with a chopping gesture. At first he had been astonished to see husky warriors jump to his command, the moment he barked at them. Now it seemed only normal. Wolden sighed and went off, among coils and bollards and grimly silent crewmen.

Greenough braced his feet against the roll of the deck. A

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gust of rain stung his cheeks. *I shouldn't have yelled at him that way,* he thought. *He means well. He's served me and fought for me and given me his blanket in winter lairs and taught me half of what I know. Ever since I was a boy at Bua.*

Almost, he was there again, under the birches that grew along the swift Oush. A meadow starred with daisies rippled in the wind, where horses and the tame unicorn which was the Luck of Bua cropped. On a hillcrest overlooking the sea, the rough-hewn buildings of the thorp blew smoke skyward. In other directions stretched forest and mountain, for this was one of the greatest estates in all Narr. But he had spent most of his time at the dock and in the boathouses, listening as Wolden yarned of journeys across the sea.

No! That was Kendrith! I, Carl Greenough, was born among sober brick walls in Baltimore. I attended a good school, watched many movies, and camped out with the Boy Scouts. Why do I envy Kendrith his childhood?

The broadsword at his hip was a welcome anchor to present reality. He squinted through the rain at the castle.

It was not large, but rose sheer on every side, two hundred feet of basalt precipice with murderous white surf below. The fortress walls were built to the very edge, further increasing that height. Above them loomed roofs and spires, gaunt against the lightning. Only at one point was there entrance. The narrow mouth of a lagoon made a gap in the cliff, protected by two skerries that formed a natural breakwater. Roches still kept numerous ships moored inside, against the day when lack of supplies must force his enemy to retreat. Though cannon were placed within the harbor to cover the mouth, it would not have been impossible for armored galleys such as Oterron possessed to force an entrance.

Except . . . a gate of thick bronze bars was set in the stone. No ship could batter that down before the cannon, firing between the bars, sank it. Erenow many had tried, and been knocked to pieces. Tabirra was as impregnable as—

Greenough continued the train of thought, grinning. Sometimes he was brought up short by a recognition of how far he had adopted Kendrith's earthy sense of humor. But mostly, these days, he took it for granted. He wondered how he could re-adapt to the relative decorum of a publisher's life.

Well, he'd be back in a body whose reflexes were conditioned otherwise than this one's. The first several weeks he'd doubtless

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have to watch himself. Thereafter, this whole world would seem as remote and dreamlike as . . . as his proper world now did.

If Kendrith, in that other body, hadn't loused everything up.

Greenough bit his lip. Ellen. How long since he'd thought about her side of this affair? Not that she knew the truth, but—

Had his final, fleeting appeal to Kendrith registered?

He hearked back, trying to recall that instant in the time beyond time and the space beyond space where the Goddess worked. Blurred, unreal, the experience had not been anything men were ever designed to endure, or to remember. First a dreadfulness, when he slumped in his office, thinking he must have had a stroke, when his soul left his body. And then Her presence.

He could certainly remember, in essence, what She told him. (If "told" was the right word.) Infinitely pitying and infinitely ruthless, that flame of a Self ordered Carl Greenough to aid Her worshipper Oterron. She could not destroy Roches and Yamaz and their gang Herself, Her power was not physical and She must work through human tools. After the final victory, if he was still alive, Greenough should return Kendrith's body to the cave, and She would put the two men back into their rightful flesh.

That much he remembered. He had rehearsed it a thousand times since. And he remembered the moment he opened Kendrith's blue eyes, which needed no glasses, and raised Kendrith's muscular frame off the cave floor. Even then he knew the pirate chief had visited this oracular grotto on an impulse which must have originated with its Dweller.

The white-robed priestress led forth outlawed Oterron, the true Emperor, to meet him. . . .

Oh, yes, thought Carl Greenough on the *Dragon's* pitching deck. That much was perfectly clear. But Kendrith's poor little ego had been there too, as overwhelmed as the other man's, so insignificant compared to Her that he had paid it scant heed. *You yourself will not do, Kendrith of Narr,* She had said. *Once out of this place, you would again be beyond My power. You would not join this war from simple love of justice; when ever did the wolf protect the lamb? Nor do you have the alien knowledge and the outworld way of thinking, which may turn the course of battle. So your part is to wait and wear the mask you are given, in that other world. I warn you, it is not like this. Your violent ways would there bring you nothing but punishment, belike death. Therefore curb yourself, wait, and hope.*

Something like that. And—

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Be kind to Ellen! Greenough had cried, as the two souls were flung past each other. He didn't know if it was heard, or had made any difference.

Since then, he'd been too busy to think much about home.

Still was, as a matter of fact.

He dismissed all feelings except an animal pleasure at the thought of combat. And of getting close to Princess Fiamma, if he lived!

Slowly the squall eased off, but the sky remained overcast and the sun went down invisible. A gig from Oterron's flagship drew alongside the *Dragon* and young Count Alunar, gorgeous in red satin and plumed helmet, came aboard. He picked his way through deepening twilight, among hairy half-naked corsairs who squatted on the deck gnawing their hardtack and polishing their weapons with no regard for his rank.

"I say, old chap, a bit of a reverse, what?" he exclaimed.

"Tell me more," snorted Greenough.

Alunar stroked his shoulder-length curls with a bediamonded hand. "But what are we to do now, eh?" he asked. "I mean to say, we've got to do something. Can't lie here forever. Apart from supplies, why, that Warlock may whistle up a storm that'll jolly well sink us all. What, what, what?"

"Does his majesty have any ideas?"

"No. He sent me here to—that is to say, no, he doesn't. Unless to try building that underwater boat you talked of."

"Useless in this situation," said Greenough. "But I'm glad you're here. Saves me the trouble of sending a man to the Emperor. Because I do have a plan."

"Eh?" Alunar adjusted his monocle. "A plan? Capital! What, may I ask?"

"Stick around. I'm about to inform my men."

Wolden rolled up with a hard-bitten two score. Greenough took them into the forepeak, where no magician in bird shape was apt to be hidden. They sat on the deck, on waterbutts and powder-kegs, with swords and axes to hand, pantherishly at ease. A single swinging lantern threw yellow light across a scarred brow, a bent nose, a heavy-thewed arm, then a big misshapen shadow gulped down the sight. The timbers groaned and the sea beat loudly just beyond.

"We should have better weather toward morning," said Greenough. "The waves'll be down, too. But plenty dark. We'll edge within a few hundred yards of the gate and go over the side. The ship'll proceed, so the harbor gunners won't suspect anything."

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"Till they see our boats come rowing, and give us a blast o' grapeshot," said Hallfry the Red.

"They won't see us at all," said Greenough. "We're swimming."

In the silence that followed, the night noises leaped forth. "I think we can seize the guns and stand off the castle garrison, long enough to unchain the gate." Greenough continued after a while. "To be sure, we won't have any armor. Our casualties may be high. They'll be total if everything doesn't work out exactly right. So if any of you want to resign, do so right now. There'll be no hard feelings."

None stirred. "Holy Tree," breathed Vandring the Smith, "what a stunt!"

Wolden had chosen his men well.

Greenough glanced at Alunar's astounded face. "We'll need a brace of galleys standing close in, but out of sight until the gates have been captured," he said. "They should be able to tell that from the noise of fighting! Then they're to row like slaves, to help open the place up and reinforce us. Once we've secured the entrance, we can admit the rest of the fleet, land our men, and fight our way up into the castle conventionally."

Alunar's monocle dropped from his eye and bobbled at the end of its string. "My dear fellow! My dear old chap! You must be crazy."

"I've known that for years," grumbled Wolden.

Hallfrey grinned. "All good Northlings are," he said.

Alunar fiddled with his rapier. "I really don't know if I should approve this."

"You have a better notion?" said Greenough. "Failure can't cost us much more than a few hundred men and a couple of galleys."

"True. True. When did you plan to, ah, embark?"

"Disembark, you damned landlubber. One hour before dawn."

"Good. Capital." Alunar's hesitation ended. "We'll have the fleet alerted and all that sort of rot, well in advance. I'll even have time for a bit of tea and a nap before coming back."

"You?" Greenough was startled.

"Well, I mean to say, dash it all," said Alunar, "we Imperials can't let you chaps hog all the glory, can we? I do hold a few swimming trophies myself, don't you know."

Remembering how the count had led the cavalry charge which turned the battle of Donda, Greenough gulped and nodded.

After that he must wait. And wait. War was mostly waiting. Pfc. Carl B. Greenough, US 57460280, had found it even more miserable to wait around in

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Korea than in Fort Bragg. Captain Kendrith, though, sent for a bottle of beer, relaxed on his bunk, swapped a few bawdy reminiscences with Wolden, and fell quickly asleep.

He was awakened shortly before the hour, and went forth into darkness. One hooded lantern picked out the men clustered at the schooner's rail. Like himself, they were naked except for helmets, knives belted at their waists, swords or axes slung across their backs under the shields. The air had turned mild again, but the sea still ran heavily.

Alunar wet his lips. He resembled a pure-bred warhorse, close to the breaking point until he could find release in action. Greenough felt glad that Kendrith's body was of more stolid temperament. If he bought it in this encounter, he bought it, and so what? That was the aristocratic warrior training which spoke: most useful in a world where warriors ruled. He clapped the young man's shoulder. "Have a drink," he advised.

"I d-d-did. On the flagship. A prime Catarunian vintage." The slender form relaxed a trifle. "Just like home, before Roches came to power. Why don't you come home with me after the war, when we've restored the good old days? To my estate. I'll show you how a gentleman deserves to live. Hunting, tourneys, actors and balladeers, feasts, boozings. And the ladies, well, the whole world knows what Caturunian ladies are like, and you'll be *the* social lion." Alunar blew a kiss at heaven. "What say Kendrith?"

And afterward sail off with Iro to discover a new hemisphere? And eventually, rich in gold, richer in contentment, settle down to be the squire of Bua?

No! That's for Kendrith! I'm to go back and commute every day between Manhattan and Westchester, remember? My proper job is to woo authors, and ride herd on editors, and goose the sales department, and outargue the tax collector. Occasionally I'll let myself publish a book I know is going to lose money, because it's good, and that will feel very adventurous.

Greenough spat over the side. "Let's go," he said.

He led the way down a Jacob's ladder. The water closed about him, chill and sensuous. He needed all his muscles to keep direction in the waves, which broke over his head with a roar the helmet magnified. But Kendrith's body was a superb engine.

The schooner slid past and was lost in the dark. Ahead, a deeper blackness against the sky, rose Tabirra. He heard the surf boom on its reefs. There were no stars, but a cold blue

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light burned high in the air, at the topmost pinnacle of the castle. Did Yamaz hunch over his books? Or Roches scowl and twist the rings on his big fingers? Or Fiamma stand at a mirror, combing her fire-colored hair before she dressed herself to walk the parapets and mock the Emperor? Greenough struck out more vigorously.

Close up, he saw white blurs defining a channel, where the sea exploded on the guardian rocks. It was calm in between. He eased his pace, gliding with enormous caution, up to the mast-high bars across the lagoon mouth. There he stopped, hanging onto a crosspiece while he caught his breath.

The metal was cold and hard in his grasp. Salt water ran from his helmet and down his face; the cap and hair beneath were sodden. A wan light flickered from either side of the entrance, touching with red the cannon that jutted out on concrete emplacements. Beyond gleamed the broad sheet of the lagoon, where ships were scattered like blocks. The cliffs rose on all sides, the castle behind the harbor.

He looked to right and left. The others had joined him. They clung to green bronze: a glimpsed shield, a shadow in the water, a mumbled oath. Despite all contempt for danger, Greenough's heart thumped.

This is it. Here goes!

He imitated a gull's mew and slipped between the bars. At the signal, his men followed. On the other side, ledges had been built along the cliff walls. They were deserted. Greenough reached up, chinned himself high, got a knee over the edge and sprang to his feet. Swiftly he slipped the shield from his back and onto his left arm, big and round and comforting to his bareness. He drew the sword at his shoulder and padded forward.

Immediately beyond the angle of the deep gateway, shielded from the sea breezes, a small fire on a hearthstone warmed Roches' gunners. They were half a dozen, seated next to a stack of cannonballs and a powder shed. Their boots and hose, curiasses and kettle helmets, were similar to Imperial uniform. One stood up, leaning on a pike. *City scum!* thought Greenough. *They wouldn't have heard me if I'd ridden a buffalo.*

He rushed.

The pikeman saw him and yelled. Firelight glistened off eyeballs beneath the headpiece. Greenough raised his shield. The point glided off its brass facing. Before the man could club his shaft, Greenough was in under his guard. The sword rose and fell. There came the heavy sensation of metal biting flesh. Wound-

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ed in the thigh, the pikeman went to his knees.

"To arms! Attack! Attack at the portal!" A trumpet brayed. Hallfrey charged and beheaded the trumpeter with one swing of blade. But the harm was done.

Another sentry stood beyond the fallen pikeman. Through the gloom, Greenough saw him raise an ax. He dropped to one knee himself, holding the shield up so he could take the blow with all his shoulder. Even so, the shock numbed his arm. He heard the wooden framework crack somewhere. His broadsword chopped at the axman's nearer wrist. It wasn't there, quite. This fellow was good! Greenough bounced back to his feet and cut again. His blow was parried by the ax handle. As he crouched, looking for an opening, the wounded pikeman seized him around the legs.

He toppled. The pikeman fell on top of him and slashed at his throat with a dagger. "Nothing doing!" Greenough snarled. He pushed the boss of his shield into the man's teeth. Rolling free, he saw the ax descend where he had been. The pikeman got in its way. Kendrith's laughter barked forth. He fell on the axman anew, wounded him also, but continued to have a fight on his hands. Sparks showered where steel met steel. They circled about, smiting. Greenough took several cuts on his bare skin, and several of his own blows were turned by the opponent's breastplate.

The cannon bulked beside him. Hardly stopping to think, he ducked around the barrel and vaulted to the top. The axman blundered past, hunting for him in the dull shadow-choked light. Greenough sprang from above, landed with both feet on the man's shoulders. He crashed to the dock. Greenough killed him.

Panting, he looked about. The fight was over, as the outnumbered gunners were cut down. One pirate was dead. On the steps which led down from the heights to the rear of the harbor, lanterns bobbed. He heard voices calling up there, trumpets, drums, a metal clangor. The garrison would arrive in moments.

"Get going!" he rapped.

Wolden and Vandring hefted their tools and disappeared into the night. Opening yonder gate would be no simple job, even with help from a galley when one arrived. It was fastened with chains heavy enough to anchor a ship, whose locks must be broken. Meanwhile the workers required protection.

"All clear over here, old chap," called Alunar merrily through the night, from the other side of the channel. "But the ruddy cannon can't be swung around to cover the shoreward approach."

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"I knew that," answered Greenough. "So mine the approach." He fumbled his way into the shed, picked up a bag, and ran out again. His men labored with him. They piled the stuff some distance from the gun and returned, laying a powder train. Someone handed Greenough a brand from the fire.

"Take shelter, or lie down flat," instructed the captain. "All hell is about to let out for noon." Several men chuckled. He'd gotten quite a reputation as a wit in the last couple of years, merely by translating the cliches of his own world. He wondered, briefly and irrelevantly, if Kendrith had done likewise.

The garrison swarmed down onto the docks and hurried toward the portal. A few primitive hand guns barked. More to be feared were the crossbows, whose quarrels buzzed nastily past Greenough's ears. Now he could see the faint sheen of armor, as the leading squad climbed his barricade. . . . He touched the brand to the powder.

Fire spurted. A wave of it rose to the sky. Some bags flared up, others exploded. Sparks and bolts and meteors fountained from end to end of the harbor. The ground jumped beneath Greenough's belly. Thunder banged in his head. Darkness followed full of echoes and hot afterimages.

For a space only the injured screamed. Then orders were shouted, whistles blown, a trumpet winded. The rebels reformed and advanced. They had guts, for sure! Unless it was only that they knew how little merciful the people they had squeezed and tormented would be to them.

"For the Goddess' sake," bawled Greenough, "aren't you ever going to get that obscenity lockbusted?"

A ragged line of soldiers came into view. Behind them, some of the ships which had been ignited by flying fire started to burn more brightly. They limned the walls and stark towers of the castle against night.

"Fall in," snapped Greenough. His score stood shield to shield, next the cannon, barring the way to the gate. Thus they would stand till relieved, or slain.

A big, bearded cuirassier darted at him, sword aloft. He interposed his shield. The blow rebounded, grazing the nosepiece of his helmet. He cut at the neck. The cuirassier parried. Their blades locked. For a moment, black under a lifting yellow curtain of fire, they strained muscle against muscle. Kendrith's body was stronger. The soldier's blade was forced back to his chest. Greenough made a sudden, sharp thrust. His point entered below the chin. The cuirassier gurgled blood.

As he sank, Greenough struck

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at the man behind him. An ax thundered on the Northling helmet. Greenough staggered, regained his feet, scythed at the ankles of someone else. Then it was strike and ward and strike again, grunting, sweating, gasping for breath, slipping in blood, and one by one seeing his comrades die.

His shield was beaten to a rag. He threw it into a man's face and defended himself with sword alone. A blade furrowed his calf. He chopped down and struck the arms which had wielded it, but his edge was so blunted that he didn't cut deeply. Bones broke, though. Hallfrey went down at his side, a spear in his guts. The buccaneer line dissolved into a few survivors, each surrounded by a pack of enemies. A halberd smote Greenough's sword so fiercely that it was torn from his grasp.

He knocked a man down with his fist, snatched a cannonball from the pile, and threw it at a tall person in a visored helmet. The helmet crumpled. The skull beneath went too. Greenough backed up to the great gun. At least they wouldn't kill him from behind.

A fresh racket broke loose. Through the brightening firelight, the haze of smoke and clamor of destruction, he saw Oterron's men. The gate was

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open and the galleys had entered. The enemy pulled away.

He sat down and wheezed.

"Here, skipper. I got this from the boat."

Greenough snatched the wine crock and drained half of it. Wolden chuckled in his gray whiskers. The mate's blacksmith hammer was splashed red. Evidently he'd waded into battle the moment the gate was unlocked. strength flowed back through Greenough. He climbed up on the gun and peered through the murk. Another Imperial ship warped into the harbor and began disgorging men. But it would take time to land the whole army, or even enough to outnumber the rebels. Meanwhile they were retreating in good order.

"If they reach the castle, they'll still have a chance of standing us off," Greenough said. "We've got to forestall that. Gather a bunch of troopers, Wolden."

He searched among the fallen around him until he found a shield to his liking. No sword looked worthwhile, but that axman who gave him so much trouble at first had wielded a lovely weapon . . . ah, here. Impulsively, Greenough closed the staring eyes. That had been a brave lad. "Thanks," he said, and went to rejoin Wolden.

The mate had assembled some thirty armored Imperials, who gaped at their leaders' unconventional costume, "We want to cut the enemy off from the castle," Greenough told them. "We might also bag good King Roches."

"Didn't you know, skipper?" said Wolden. "That's been done."

"What?"

"That big man over there, who got his noddle bashed in with a cannonball somebody pitched. I noticed royal insignia on his breastplate, and opened the visor to make sure. I've seen him myself a few times before the war, when I came trading."

"Why . . . in that case—No. I suppose we're in as much danger while Yamaz is alive."

"And Fiamma," said a man-at-arms harshly.

"Well—uh—a woman can't succeed to the throne, so if she was safely married off, to somebody without Muntarist pretensions—" Greenough felt his countenance go hot. The fire in the harbor wasn't entirely responsible. "Come on, you sons," he growled.

They hastened over the piers, avoiding combat. The principal fight on this side was taking place near the cliff, where the rebels had rallied into formation and were beating off the Imperial attacks as they moved slowly toward the stairs. On Greenough's right, the lagoon was a cauldron, bellowing and reeking, its flames

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as high as the castle walls. Heat gusted around him. Still another ship negotiated the gateway and started landing men.

Greenough put foot on rock-hewn treads. Smoke stung his eyes. Halfway up, it was so thick he must grope through red-shot murk. But the air at the clifftop was clear. He looked across a sea gleaming like mercury in the first false dawnlight. Had the battle lasted that long? Or, rather, only that long?

The iron door at the head of the staircase was open. A squad of sentries challenged the approaching men. "For the House of Muntar," Greenough yelled back. Not the rebel password, surely, but their slogan—and what with the similarity of equipment, and the general confusion—The door was not closed in his face. He fell upon the squad with his troop and cut them to pieces.

Beyond, a wide, paved court reached to the far side of the island. Part of it was covered by gardens, part by lesser buildings. Mountainous in the center rose the donjon keep. Smoke and fog streamers drifted across emptiness, under the graying sky. "Stay here," Greenough commanded. "Shut the gate against the enemy. They won't have a chance to ram it down, with our forces at their backs. I'm going to the entrance on the other side."

The flagstones were cool and wet with dew under his feet. The threshing of battle seemed very distant. Until he rounded a buttress and saw the twin gate, where men struck each other. So someone else had had the same idea! Greenough ran to help.

A clear, happy voice soared above the cursing and clashing. Alunar. Good to know he was alive. As Greenough approached, the count broke through the defending line and crossed swords with a guard.

A blackness glided down above them. For one second, Greenough thought wildly about clouds . . . nothing else could be so huge. . . . He saw wings and beak and talons. The condor snatched at Alunar's head.

Greenough hurled his ax.

The bird shrieked as it fell. The enemy guardsman stared, threw down his sword, and ran. Alunar sprang to skewer the condor. A wing knocked him rolling. Then the black bird shuddered, once, and became an old dead man.

Greenough helped Alunar rise. "Whoof!" said the noble. "A rum go, what? Blasted thing would've had my eyes in another tick. Much thanks, old chap."

"Yamaz?" asked Greenough.

Alunar nodded. "Quite. Nice work."

"And Roches is dead. I think we've won."

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"True. Take an hour or so yet to convince the jolly old opposition." Alunar withdrew his rapier from the carcass, but its point was corroded off. He flung the weapon aside. There was no need for it anyway. Shaken, the sentries had fled down the stairs. His own men warded the door.

"Any other holdouts up here?" wondered Greenough.

"Doesn't seem so." Alunar swept the utter stillness of the castle with a monocled glance.

"Let's check. The boys won't need our help to maintain these gates."

As he swung across the courtyard with his friend, Greenough felt his heartbeat accelerate. By the time he had entered the high main archway of the keep, his blood was brawling.

Victory! A whole empire ready to embrace and reward the Northling who had liberated her. Afterward, a world to wander, and the dear green hills of Bua, and—

No, what was he thinking? He could go home to Ellen now. That was all he was thinking. Nothing more. The grotto of the Goddess lay a few days' sail from here. He could be himself, Carl Greenough, in his own proper body and his own proper house, within the week.

The castle chambers were magnificent with tapestry and beaten gold. What a place to loot! Slaves bent low to the conquerors, bloodstained, bristle-chinned, clad in helmets and smoke smudges. "Where's Princess Fiamma?" Alunar inquired. "We'd best make sure of her, don't you know. Potential troublemaker, yes, rather."

"Especially with her father to avenge," nodded Greenough. His quick, irrational sadness jumped over to joy when Alunar replied:

"Oh, that doesn't matter. It's been notorious for years, she couldn't stand him. He murdered her mother, you see, in one of his drunken rages. But because of pride and all that sort of rot, she stayed by him as Princess of the Empire. Even now, I wager, she won't swear fealty to Oterron; or she'll break whatever oath she does give at the first opportunity. There are still plenty of Muntarists around. If she married one of 'em—" Alunar sighed. "At the same time, one rather hates to decapitate her. Ungallant, what?"

A shaking eunuch conducted them to the gynaeceum. Its door was locked. Greenough rapped with his ax. "Open up in there!" he called.

"Open to a barbarian?" answered a voice which was ice and music. "I'll see you in Ginnungagap first!"

With Kendrith's blunt practicality, Greenough struck the lock

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a few shrewd ax blows. It burst. He entered.

A vase whizzed through the air and shattered on his helmet. Her maidservants screamed and fled through the dawnlit rooms beyond, but Fiamma sprang at Greenough with a knife.

He barely ducked the blow. She hissed and tried again. He caught her arm and yanked the dagger free. As it tinkled to the floor, she cursed him and tried to claw his eyes. He closed one big hand around both her wrists, clasping them firmly behind her back. Her thin robe got torn in the process, but he didn't mind. With his other arm he pulled her close.

Never had he imagined so much beauty.

It was as if someone else spoke with his voice, arrogant and desirous: "Your cause is finished. I, Kendrith, broke you. Now I've come for my booty."

"You filthy savage!" She bit him. He cuffed her.

Laughing, he picked her up. She struggled like a lynx, but he was so much stronger that he merely enjoyed it. "Let's talk this over in private," he said, and carried her into the next room.

Alunar raised his brows, clicked his tongue, and settled down to wait.

Much later, when Oterron's men swarmed triumphant through the castle, Greenough emerged. Fiamma walked beside him, leaning on his arm. Now and then she rubbed her tousled red head against his shoulder, or nuzzled his cheek. "Tell me more about Narr," she purred. "I can't wait to get there."

"I can," he said. "We'll take the *Dragon* and cruise along the Chabarro, visit Alunar, take a long vacation. How I need one!"

Her lashes fluttered downward. "As my lord wishes. What do you plan beyond that . . . for us?"

He didn't answer.

But surely the Goddess wouldn't mind if he took a month with Fiamma. Only one little month.

He stood in too much awe of Her not to return then. But his unaided sense of duty would never have drawn him back.

Back to being Carl Greenough.

The little man finished his drink and looked at his watch. "Where can Ellen have got to?" he fussed. "She was supposed to have been here half an hour ago."

"You know what women are like," I smiled.

"Not in that other world," he said with a touch of wistfulness.

"You're certainly made the place sound like an adolescent's paradise."

"Really? I didn't mean to. In talking about it, naturally I dwelt on the more colorful as-

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pects. There was also the usual quota of everyday problems and everyday frustrations. Of course."

"Then why didn't you want to return home?"

"I'd been another man for so long. Can't you see? I told you several times, the body and the mind are indivisible. I'd thought with his brains, wrestled with his problems, played with his friends, wondered what lay beyond his horizons, for two years. I'd become him. Far more, toward the end, than I remained my old self."

He gazed into his empty glass. "It makes me wonder what the self is," he mused. "What's the basic thing we call 'I'? Not a bundle of personality traits. You're nothing like the person you were twenty years ago; yet both have been you. Isn't your ego, your inmost identity, isn't it precisely the continuity of experience? The evolution itself, from phase to phase of life?"

I wasn't interested in half-baked philosophy, and told him so. "Once you'd made the transition," I said, "you'd soon grow to prefer your original body again. Wouldn't you?"

"Well, no." He frowned in somewhat alcoholic thought. "I don't believe so. I'd always miss what I'd had in those two years —a freshness, a glamor, a sense of accomplishing something important and meaningful instead of playing with uninteresting toys. And my wife, the new one I'd gained. I loved her, you can't imagine how I loved her. When I felt the Goddess wrench my mind free, it was worse than dying. May I never have such a moment again."

His distress was so plain that I wondered, with a chill along my spine, if he really had been telling me a fable for our mutual amusement. Perhaps he believed it! Though he didn't act like a man with delusions.

"How I cursed Greenough and his damned sense of duty," he muttered. "I did so in Her very presence. When our egos met, and merged, and scanned each other's memories of the last two years, I told him what a dreary fool he was."

"At least you—Hey! Greenough, did you say?" I gaped across the table.

He looked surprised too, then recovered his poise. "Why, sure," he said. "I didn't mean to admit it, but there's no reason why I shouldn't. If you think back, you'll note I never claimed otherwise. Who do you suppose I'd be?

"Look, for two years I'd been here, among towers as high as mountains, served by machines more powerful than magic, the most fabulous parts of the world no further away than a few days'

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flying. Flying!" His eyes glittered behind their lenses. "No famines, no pestilences, no smoky chimneys, no plodding sailships and springless wagons, no surly slaves, no ignorant barbarians, no unwashed hussies or damned would-be queens, half cat—the sweetest, loyallest women ever created, all to myself! And I could relax, didn't have to take a spear along everytime I went out for a breath of air. And my IQ must have been thirty points higher, with all that that means in the way of awareness. And I'd applied some notions of my own world to the publishing business and had just really got them going good. In another five years I'd be running rings around my competitors. Judas priest!" he burst out. "Did you think *I* wanted to return?"

I sat still for a while. The bar clattered around us, filling up with the cocktail hour crowd. "So you didn't?" I asked gently.

He smiled. "No. The Goddess laughed and put us both where we desired. I'll always remember Her laughter."

He twisted around in his seat. An ordinary-looking woman had come through the door, her arms full of packages. "Ah, there's Ellen," he said, rising. "Will you join us for a drink?"

I got up also. Plain to see, his invitation was from politeness only. He was starting to regret his lubricated tongue. In any case, he had eyes for none but the woman.

"No, thanks," I said. "I've had enough."

THE END

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Father Amion knew it was impossible to serve God and Mammon at the same time. Yet, could there be any harm in praying for a . . .

LONG SHOT

By
HENRY SLESAR

ILLUSTRATOR EMSH

ONE rainswept Sunday morning, Father Amion received a reminder from Heaven that the roof of his modest church was in urgent need of repairs. At a vestryman's meeting the following week, it was resolved that nine years was too long a time between paint jobs, but no suggestions were forthcoming as to where the funds could be obtained. And another Sunday, as he delivered his sermon to a congregation of less than forty souls, a party of late arrivals came down the church aisle to the accompaniment of squeaking floorboards that made him wince in the pulpit.

It was understandable then, why Father Amion began paying more than usual attention to the amounts in the collection plate. The parish he served was an excellent one, by ecclesiastical standards, since its members were poor and in need of the solace he could offer. But as the minister told Bishop Cannon one day, with a sad smile on his gentle old face, the church wasn't rich enough to own its own

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mouse. The Bishop laughed, and offered to donate one of his own.

On the Sunday after Easter, there was the usual decline in attendance in Father Amion's church, and the fact was no surprise to him. However, there was a surprise in the collection plate. Sitting atop the coins and one-dollar bills was the unmistakable U.S Treasury Department engraving of Alexander Hamilton. When Morton, his friend and sexton, brought the fact to his attention, Father Amion said gratefully:

"Ten dollars! I don't think I've seen a ten-dollar bill in the plate since before the war. Did you see who it was, Morton?"

Morton had. "There was someone in the fourth pew on the left, Father; I've never seen him at services before. Sort of a rough-looking man, wearing a rather, well, odd jacket."

"How do you mean, odd?"

"I believe the word is loud, Father."

"Do you mean the gentleman with the pink-checked suit? I noticed him, of course. But I don't think it's kind of you to criticize his clothes, Morton."

"Oh, I wasn't criticizing, Father." Morton grinned plumply. "Especially after I saw his donation." The grin faded when he saw the minister's frowning response, and he added a hasty apology for his mercenary attitude. Father Amion sighed, and touched his arm.

"It's all right, Morton, I understand how you feel. It seems a shame that we have to be so preoccupied with our expenses, but I don't feel justified in asking the diocese for any more help than they've already given."

"The Lord will provide," the sexton said mournfully.

It was during the Wednesday afternoon service that Father Amion saw the man in the pink-checked jacket again. He nodded and smiled at him, but the man was so engrossed in private prayer that he failed to catch the minister's glance. As he left, he placed a five-dollar bill in the poor box at the church door. On the following day, Father Amion was surprised to see him again, and on Friday, he found himself looking for him. Sure enough, he arrived early, the first and only worshipper who seemed in need of spiritual support that morning. The poor box was ten dollars richer when he left.

On Sunday, Father Amion selected the subject of Generosity, and hoped that the man in the pink-checked jacket, now sitting in the front pew, realized implication of gratitude in his words. After the service, he approached him.

"May I speak with you a moment?" he asked.

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The man's ruddy face reddened further. He was a big, heavy-set man, with large, red hands. They seemed impossible to manage, so he stuck them in his coat pockets and said: "Hello, Father. I, er, sure enjoyed your sermon."

"I hope you realize that some of it was meant for you. I couldn't help but notice how generous you've been to our poor church in the past week. Are you new in the parish?"

"New?" The man blinked, and then smiled uneasily. "No, Father, I been living here twenty years. Only I never was much for churches, you know? First time I came in here was two weeks ago, on a Sunday."

"I'm certainly glad you changed your mind. Seems to me you've been here almost every day this week."

"Er, sure. It's all right, ain't it, Father? I mean, you don't mind?"

"Mind? Why should I mind?"

"Well, I dunno. Er, my name is Sheridan, Father." He had a difficult time getting his large hand out of his pocket, but succeeded and shook hands with the minister. "I sure appreciate it, you know what I mean? It's meant a lot to me."

"I'm glad."

"So am I. You see, when I saw that little sign of yours outside, the one that said TRY PRAYER, I figured to myself, what can I lose? So I came in and heard your sermon."

"And did it help?"

"Oh, it helped, all right. I figured, what the heck—excuse me, Father—I figured I tried everything else, and nothing worked, so maybe I ought to take your advice. So I did, and boy how it worked, Father. I mean it really worked."

It was moments like these that made Father Amion swell with joy in his calling, that made his forty years of service seem worthwhile. He smiled with pleasure, until the man added:

"You won't believe this, Father, but I had six winners out of eight the next day. Six winners, one of 'em a twenty-to-one long shot. I didn't have a day like that since I first started going to the track. I was down to my last two bucks, and—"

"Just a moment," Father Amion said quickly, his head reeling. "I don't understand what you mean."

"The track, Father, the horses." He shuffled his feet apologetically. "Look, I know you'll get sore at me about this, I guess you don't go for gambling and stuff—"

"*My* sermon sent you to the track?"

"No, no, Father, I was going anyway. I go all the time, that's how I make my living. I used to

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be in the used car business, but I don't know, I got tired of it. So when I saw that sign of yours, I figured, give it a whirl, Charlie, what can you lose? So I prayed, Father. Boy, did I pray! Give me a winner! I said. Please, please, give me a winner!" He grinned, happy as a child. "And I got six of 'em!"

Father Amion, not a tall man anyway, felt two feet high. In a choked voice, he said: "I don't think you understood my message at all, Mr. Sheridan. I said prayer could work miracles, but not for such selfish purposes."

"Oh, it was a miracle, all right," Sheridan said reassuringly. "Just like you said, Father. And I owe it all to you, so if there's any way I can help you —"

"Please! You've made a terrible mistake, Mr. Sheridan, there's been an awful misunderstanding. Prayer isn't intended for horse races; it's too sacred a thing for that. You can't pray for your purse and not your soul—"

"I knew you'd be sore," Sheridan said wistfully.

"No, no, I'm not angry." Father Amion squeezed his hands together and prayed silently for inspiration to say the right words. "Well, look at it this way, Mr. Sheridan. What if *everyone* at the track prayed to God for their horse to win? Now you know that isn't possible, so don't you see what a dilemma would be offered up to the Lord? Is that *fair?*"

Sheridan blinked. "I never thought of it that way. I guess you're right, Father."

"Then you do see how wrong it is?"

Sheridan pondered a moment, and then his face brightened. "Sure, it would be tough, Father. I mean if everyone was praying for a winner. Only they're not, see? They don't know about this deal yet. That's their hard luck!"

Father Amion sighed. "I'm afraid you still don't understand, Mr. Sheridan."

"But is it okay for me to keep coming here? I mean, if you don't want me to—"

"No, no, I never meant that. This is a house of God, and you're always welcome. But I hope you come to realize the falsity of your purpose—"

"Oh, it's not false," Sheridan said pleasantly. "I tested it good. Almost every time I pray for a winner, it comes in. My record ain't a hundred percent, but it's better than it ever was. So if you don't mind—"

"I don't mind," Father Amion said dejectedly. "I just hope the Lord doesn't mind, Mr. Sheridan."

Father Amion didn't see his horse-playing parishioner until

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the following Thursday. He nodded to him courteously, but didn't interrupt his silent meditations. He was in the same pew on Friday morning, and when Morton passed him, Sheridan looked up for a moment, and then went on mumbling his prayers. Later, Morton reported what he heard Sheridan say, and was obviously shocked.

"He was saying something about Satan, Father, I'm sure he was! What sort of man *is* he?"

"Satan? Are you really sure, Morton?"

"Yes! Or maybe the word was devil. That was it—red devil! He kept saying it over and over."

Father Amion pursed his lips. "I wouldn't worry about it. It was undoubtedly the name of a horse."

On Sunday, he learned that he was right. Sheridan approached him timidly after the service, and said: "Fifteen twenty, Father, that's what the horse payed. And when I made the bet, I said to myself, five bucks of this is for the church if Red Devil wins. So sure enough, Father, the horse wins, and I put the thirty-five bucks in the plate. I hope it's okay, Father."

"I'm not asking where your donation came from Mr. Sheridan," Father Amion said, somewhat severely. "I thank you for it, but I'd rather not hear about its source."

"You still mad at me?"

"I was never 'mad' at you," the minister said gently. "I'm praying for you, Mr. Sheridan."

"You are?" Sheridan said, glowing. "Boy, now I *know* I can't miss, Father!"

"Don't misunderstand. I'm praying for your soul to win, Mr. Sheridan, not your horses."

"Oh."

"But don't think I'm ungrateful. Frankly, our church is a poor one, and we can use any contributions. You've been a help to us, and I'm grateful."

"You're welcome, Father, you deserve it. And listen, anytime I really think I've got something special, and you want me to place a bet—"

"Really, Mr. Sheridan!"

"No offense, Father, I just thought—"

"Please don't think such things. I have no wish to interfere in your way of life, but I certainly don't wish to get involved. Our church will survive without race horses."

"I'm sorry, Father, I didn't mean any harm."

"I know," the minister said. "Good day, Mr. Sheridan." Then he watched the horseplayer move down the aisle to the exit. The floorboards squeaked more loudly than ever under his considerable weight.

On Tuesday afternoon, Father

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Amion was returning to the church after a visit with a bedridden parishioner, when he heard the horn honking for his attention. He turned to see the shining blue automobile at the curb, its convertible top down, and its occupant sliding over to talk to him.

"Hi, Father!" said Sheridan cheerfully. "Could I give you a lift?"

"It's only a few blocks," the minister said. "I rather enjoy the walk."

"How do you like it?" Sheridan said, waving his hand to indicate the length of the car. "Brand new, Father, and I don't owe a nickel on it. From now on, I travel in style."

"A very handsome vehicle," Father Amion said solemnly. "I wish you pleasure from it, Mr. Sheridan."

"Oh, don't worry about that. Would you believe it, a couple of weeks ago I had less than two bucks in the world?"

"It's remarkable," the minister admitted. "No doubt of that."

"To tell you the truth," Sheridan said confidently, "it's a gas-burner. The engine overheats and it costs a fortune to operate. But with my luck lately, I can afford it. You know how many races I won this week?"

"No."

"Fourteen out of eighteen. Everytime I pray *real* hard for a winner, it's practically a sure thing." He looked away sheepishly. "You know, I was noticing that your place needs painting, Father. I ain't got much capital I can spare right now, but if you had a few bucks you wanted to bet—wait a minute, don't get sore yet—there's a horse running next Saturday named Sally's Gal, and—"

"I thought we'd closed this subject, Mr. Sheridan."

"Just let me finish, Father. I know you're against betting, but let me tell you about this horse." He edged closer to the curb, and dropped his voice to a whisper. "This Sally's Gal, she's been training in secret, Father, and I got it straight from the owners that she's ready. They clocked her at five seconds better than the track record, not just once but a couple of times. And next week she runs her first big race, with nothing but colts. Now you know how maidens run from colts, Father—"

"I know nothing of the kind," Father Amion said.

"Sure," Sheridan said blandly. "They run like crazy. Anyway, the owners figure the morning-line odds will be like twenty-to-one, and they'll probably get bigger. So it looks great, Father, and if I *really* start praying—"

"I must go," Father Amion said. "I have a vestrymen's meeting at four o'clock."

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"Okay, Father, I just wanted to tell you about it," Sheridan said, slipping behind the wheel of his new car. "I'm personally putting my last nickel on this horse, and if you want part of the deal, I'm willing to help you out."

"Goodbye, Mr. Sheridan," Father Amion said, with less than his usual courtesy.

But Father Amion's encounter with Sheridan was only the forerunner of an even more disappointing occasion. The vestrymen's meeting turned out to be a sad recitation of the church's financial troubles. The question of repairs was tabled to make way for a discussion of normal operating expenses, all of which seemed to be too high. The chairman of the meeting, smiling painfully, speculated that Father Amion was perhaps a better minister than a businessman, and cited some foolhardy charities on Father Amion's part that made the sensible administration of the church treasury—now containing less than six hundred dollars—difficult if not impossible. Father Amion admitted to the charge, but made no promises to correct his faults. By the time the meeting broke up, he found himself thinking about Mr. Sheridan's new blue car.

The horseplayer attended services every day that week. Father Amion didn't speak to him until Friday morning, and when he did, something happened that he was unable to explain to himself for the rest of his life.

"Good morning, Father," Sheridan said amiably. "It's sure a nice day, ain't it? I hope it's nice tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" the minister said vaguely.

"Yeah. Tomorrow's *it* you see, the race. And Sally's Gal, she's okay in the mud but she's better on a nice dry track. I'm putting the works on her, Father. If everything goes all right, I'm afraid you won't be seeing me around no more."

"Why is that?"

"I'll be buying me a place in Florida. Near Hialeah."

Father Amion smiled gently. "I wish you the best of luck, Mr. Sheridan, I honestly do."

He was just turning away, when an impulse made him turn about and say:

"Mr. Sheridan—"

"Yeah, Father?"

"You're really *that* sure about this horse?"

"I'm positive, Father. I been praying all week, and I *know* the horse has the stuff."

"If someone bet say, five hundred dollars on this horse—what might he expect to win?"

"Well, let's see," Sheridan said, biting his lip. "At the very least, if the horse paid ten bucks—but

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it'll be more, Father, lots more —he'd make about twenty-five hundred dollars."

Father Amion, standing in the aisle, swayed on the balls of his feet. The floorboards squeaked. Then he said, dreamily:

"Suppose I gave you five hundred dollars, Mr. Sheridan? Would you place this bet for me?"

"You mean it, Father?"

Father Amion shut his eyes. "Would you, Mr. Sheridan?"

"Sure, Father, I'd be happy to."

"I'll be with you in a few minutes. Would a check be all right?"

"I can handle a check, Father," Sheridan grinned.

Not five minutes after Sheridan's stocky figure was out of sight, Father Amion regretted his action. Clapping his hands together imploringly, he raced down the aisle to the church door and into the street, looking up and down to catch a glimpse of the horseplayer or his conspicuous blue automobile. There was nothing in sight but a group of dirty urchins playing stickball in the street; angrily, he scolded them for using the church steps as second base, and then returned inside with his heart full of chagrin and sorrow. He could never explain the impulse, not to himself, to his congregation, to the vestryman, and most of all, to God. And when he saw Morton, the sexton, who looked at his troubled face with curiosity, he found that he couldn't even explain it to his closest friend.

"What's the matter, Father?" Morton said anxiously. "You don't look well."

"I don't feel well," he whispered.

The sexton, quickly concerned, came to his side. "You've been working too hard lately, Father. Maybe you should lie down a bit . . ."

"No, no, I can't do that. I have something else to do, something important." Even as he said the words, the duty became clear in his mind. "Morton, you know that Mr. Sheridan?"

"Yes, Father?"

"Do you know where he lives? Did he ever leave his address with us?"

"No, Father."

"I thought not," Father Amion said unhappily. "Then I must go out this afternoon, Morton, to see Bishop Cannon."

"But you saw him only yesterday, Father. And the Community Mothers will be here in half an hour."

"I must see him again. Please call the chairlady and postpone the meeting until next week."

"Very well, Father, if you say so. How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know," Father Amion said hollowly.

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He was fortunate in finding the Bishop home. Bishop Cannon, a vigorous man ten years Father Amion's junior, was famous for his energy and activity; it was a rare thing to find him enjoying a quiet afternoon in his sitting room. He looked up with a puzzled face when Father Amion entered, put down the book he was reading, and offered the minister a seat. He asked no questions about the visit, for he could see that Father Amion was bursting with the answers.

"I need your help," the minister said, kneading his hands and looking at the carpet. "I've done something terrible, Bishop Cannon, and I must have your advice."

The Bishop nodded. "I'm honored by that, Father. But I find it hard to believe that you could do anything so terrible."

Then Father Amion told him, and the Bishop's disbelief was transformed into shocked amazement.

"A horse, Father? You're not serious? You took five hundred dollars from the church treasury to bet on a horse?"

Father Amion bowed his head. "I can never forgive myself for what I did. I'll never understand what made me do it. The man seemed so sure of himself, so successful, and there's been nothing but talk of our need for money for so long . . . Help me to understand what I've done, Bishop Cannon, help me to explain it to myself . . ."

"I can't believe it! Father, if I didn't know you so well—" The Bishop stood up, and paced the floor with a hand to his cheek. "If you were a novice, if you were a young man—I might understand such a thing. But it's forty years, Father! Forty years since you took your vows! And to do such a thing now—"

"I know, I know," Father Amion said, in torment. "I've sinned against everything I believe in—"

"Not only against God, Father. But against your flock, against the Church you serve. For all I know, even against the Law! That money was in your trust; it belonged to the parish, not to you."

"I would have stopped the check if I could, but the bank's are already closed—"

The Bishop sat down again, staring glumly ahead, weighing his next words. When he spoke again, it was with solemn gravity.

"You say you don't know how to find this man?"

"No."

"And there is no way to prevent him from using the church funds?"

"No, there isn't. The race is tomorrow." Father Amion looked wistfully out of the window.

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"And it's getting cloudy. The track will probably be muddy."

The Bishop stood up, clapping his hands on his knees. "Then there is only one thing to do, Father. Only one way to make amends for this sin."

"And that?"

"You must pray, Father. You must pray as you have never prayed before, and I will add my prayers to yours." He glowered at the minister, extending his arm. "You must pray for that horse *not* to win, Father Amion."

The minister gasped. "Not to win?"

"Yes. There must be no reward for your error, Father, no matter what the consequences. I can see no other answer, than to rectify the mistake by asking God to withhold this sinful victory. You must pray for this with all your might."

"But the money, Bishop Cannon! We're in such need now. To lose that five hundred dollars—"

"The money isn't important. There is more at stake now. Will you do as I ask?"

Father Amion slumped in the chair.

"I will, Bishop Cannon. I know you're right, of course. The horse mustn't win."

When he left, the Bishop was already at prayer.

Father Amion returned to the church at five, ate a light repast, and then retired to the small chapel next to the vestry. He told Morton that he wasn't to be disturbed, and began his marathon of prayer. He prayed until ten that evening, until Morton disobeyed his injunction, poked his head into the chapel, and murmured something about food. Father Amion sent him away, and continued to ask the Lord's forgiveness for his error, and to prevent Sally's Gal from winning the race the next day. He began to nod at midnight, and went to sleep on the narrow cot in the vestry. He awoke at six, and resumed his prayers.

When Father Amion emerged from the chapel at noon that Saturday, the sexton was waiting for him with anxious questions. Father Amion didn't answer, but went to his study to prepare the next day's sermon. He had no trouble selecting the quotation that would begin his message. It was from *Timothy VI*, and began: *"The love of money . . ."*

He was unaware of the passing hours; at five-thirty, his sermon completed, he came out of the study to see that Sheridan, the horseplayer, was sitting in the front pew.

Sheridan was a ruddy man, but not at this moment. His face was as pale as the pink checks of his jacket, and every feature was pulled downwards. Father Amion was touched by the man's melan-

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choly, and came forward. Sheridan looked up at his approach, but when Father Amion addressed him, he seemed unable to answer.

"It's all right, my son," Father Amion said kindly. "I understand."

"What's that, Father? Understand what?"

"About the race today. I suppose you just returned?"

"Yeah, I just got back. I put that money down for you, just like you said."

"I don't want you to feel as if you are to blame. You were trying to do good in your own fashion; whatever blame there is must fall upon my shoulders."

Sheridan blinked rapidly. "I don't get you, Father." He reached into his coat for his wallet, and produced one that was bulging enormously. "Here's your money, Father. It's not as much as I thought it would be, but I guess it'll help." He counted it out slowly, and said: "Two thousand one hundred dollars, Father. You better count it yourself."

Father Amion looked at the pile of bills in his hand, and his eyes rounded. "I don't understand. This can't be mine."

"Oh, it's yours, all right," the horseplayer said. "Go on, take it, Father."

"No! There must be some mistake!"

"Huh?"

"You can't mean that the horse won. You're fooling me, Mr. Sheridan, tell me it isn't true. Tell me Sally's Gal didn't win!"

"Win? Nah, she didn't win!"

"She didn't?"

"No," Sheridan said miserably. "She was doing great until the stretch; she was four lengths ahead of the pack. Then all of a sudden she dies on me, Father, I don't know why. A sure thing like that, and she quits."

"But if the horse didn't win—why do you bring me all this money?"

Sheridan smiled wearily. "Look, Father, you didn't think I was gonna risk *your* dough on a win bet, did you? I mean, for a guy like me, that's okay. But I played it safe and put your money on a *place* bet. The horse didn't win, but it came in second. It payed four-twenty."

"You mean I get this money, even if the horse didn't win?"

"Sure, Father, that's right."

"But you looked so unhappy. I thought—"

Sheridan made a despairing gesture. "Me, I wasn't so smart, Father. I put every nickel I had on the nose. Now I'm right back where I started, with two bucks in my pocket. You know something?" he said gloomily. "I think maybe I'll go back to the used car business. You think that's a good idea, Father?"

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"Yes," Father Amion said shakily, taking the bills from his hand. "I think that's probably a wonderful idea, Mr. Sheridan."

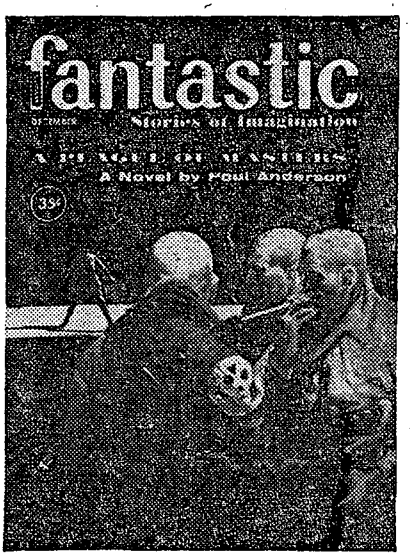
On the way out, the horse-player hesitated at the poor box, then took the last two dollars out of his wallet and pushed them through the slot. Then he waved his hand, and went out the door.

THE END

★ ★ ★

COMING NEXT MONTH

Dominic Flandry begins another incredible adventure in the December issue of FANTASTIC.



In the first installment of **Poul Anderson's** new novel, *A Plague of Masters,* Flandry, the devil-may-care interstellar counterspy, visits a world where a man can live only 30 days—unless those who control the planet give him another month of life.

Backing up the novel will be a quartet of short stories headed by a meaningful tale by **Arthur Porges,** *The Melanas,* and all FANTASTICS' usual departments.

The December issue will be on sale at your newsstand November 22.

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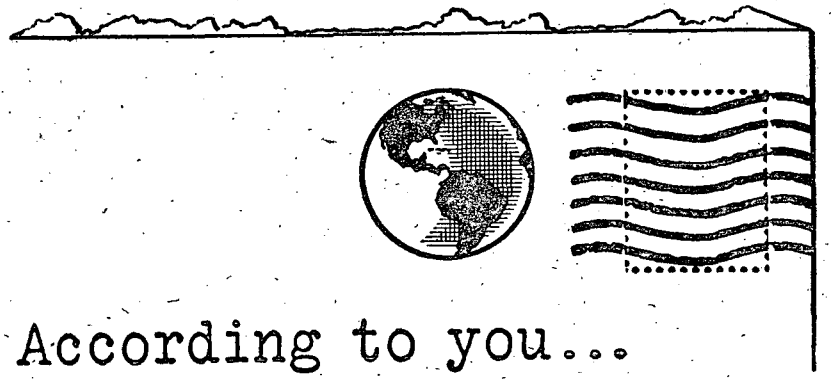

According to you...

Dear Editor:

I think that I have come up with an idea on a policy change that will not only please your casual readers but also the fans who read your magazine. Let me outline it briefly for you and see what you think of it.

Add thirty-two pages and divide them up in the following manner. Twenty-seven pages for more fiction and five, mind you, five measly pages, for a fan department, preferably a fanzine review column. I hope you will consider this seriously.

The following has nothing to do with the above. Recently a friend of mine who has had a story or two printed in a prozine told me he sent a story to you and that when it was returned the rejection slip was signed by H. L. Gold. What gives? Has he bought *Amazing* and *Fantastic?*

Harry Thomas
Brookside
Sweetwater, Tenn.

● *Adding thirty-two pages to a magazine involves considerable expense and requires much thought and planning. We are trying hard, for fans' sake, to hold the price line. No, H.L.G. hasn't bought us out. Probably just intercepting our mail looking for good stories.*

Dear Editor:

Fantastic, in my opinion, has always been a rotten magazine. Recently it seemed to be improving. The Lovecraft short, although predictable, was good; the 'round robin in the July issue was good

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and "The Crispin Affair" was the first Sharkey story that was worth reading. However, the August issue had a story called "The World-Timer" in it. "The World-Timer," in my opinion, stinks. Where does Bloch get his reputation as a writer? The only worthwhile thing of his I've ever seen is the conclusion to "The Covenant." Is "The World-Timer" to be considered as a sign that you are planning to return to *Fantastic's* old policy of printing only the worst tripe that the editor can lay hands on?

Sam Cahan
1901 Lydia
Waukegan, Ill.

● *Feel better? We encourage catharsis, and hope you enjoyed yours.*

Dear Editor:

In your July issue you printed a letter from one Leland Sapiro, stating that the "eternal daylight" idea described in your April editorial was first put forth in the July 1934 *Astounding Stories* in a story called "Guns of Eternal Day" by David Woodbury. Well, I'd like to correct Mr. Sapiro. His quotation is correct, as are his magazine and page references, but if he'll check through his files once again he'll find that "Guns" was written by one Howard W. Graham, Ph.D. Woodbury's story in that issue was the one listed before "Guns" in the contents, and was called "The Electric Snare." It had nothing to do with eternal daylight.

Incidentally, neither story is worth reading.

Julian Reid
322 Plaskett Place
Victoria, B. C., Canada

● *Well, you certainly wrapped that one up. Thanks for your correction.*

Dear Editor:

Magnificent! That's the word for your August issue of *Fantastic.* The cover, the stories—everything! By far the best issue you've put out for at least a year.

Fantastic is on a rising curve of improvement as it was last summer and fall, only this time the improvement curve is higher. I only hope it doesn't descend back into mediocrity again as it did gradu-

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ally through last winter and spring. In my book, for the present, *Fantastic* surpassed *Amazing* in quality a few months ago.

I hadn't noticed it too much before, but you really do try to improve along the lines suggested to you by the readers and writers for your letter column. The latest fad has been for fantasy, for which I am in avid agreement, and in your August edition that's just about all there was. Every short a fantasy—it was wonderful.

Robert Bloch is my favorite writer, and when I see a story of his previewed in the Coming Next Month section, needless to say, I expect excellence, and I usually get just that. I agreed definitely with the main point in his slightly satirical novelet, "The World-Timer". Time is running out for this world, and I would *never* pass up such a chance as to get out and into a Utopia such as he described.

I have at least a half dozen Utopias of my own—some leaning toward harems, others toward horrors, and even one for solitude. I call that last one my Mind World, because that's just where it is. Ever try looking inside your own mind?

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N. Y.

• *Yes, and we didn't recover for weeks! Almost missed an issue deadline, and we've promised the printer never to inspect our cerebellum again.*

Dear Editor:

In your August issue, I was gratified to see the neglected M. P. Shiel publicized in the latest of Sam Moskowitz's excellent articles. But I must take exception to several points:

1. Shiel's biographer and literary executor is not John Galsworthy, but John Gawsworth.

2. The detective in *The Pale Ape* is not King Cummings Monk, but Cummings King Monk.

3. *The Isle of Lies,* listed by Sam among Shiel's nonfantasies, is science fiction on several counts, notably in that it centers around a superman (or, to use Shiel's term, overman).

4. The earlier book of which *The Yellow Peril* is a rewrite is not *The Yellow Wave,* but *The Yellow Danger.* (I can't blame Sam much for that confusion!)

5. It's chronologically impossible for Shiel to have been a "neo-Nazi." What Sam probably meant was "proto-Nazi"—but in my

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opinion, Shiel could not have been that either.

I want to expand on that last point. It's true that Shiel accepted the popular stereotype of Jews, Negroes, and Orientals, and that this reflects no credit on him. But it takes more than that to make a Nazi. You can see the difference in *The Lord of the Sea.*

The villain, Frankl, is a Jew, and throughout the book Shiel depicts Jews as sharp businessmen, potentially dangerous to non-Jews. But his hero, Hogarth, is also a Jew; so is the heroine, Rebekah. Shiel's heroes are never completely wise and good, but are humanly fallible; there's no reason to think Hogarth's edict against the Jews is meant other than ironically by Shiel (Hogarth, again contrary to Sam, is not aware until near the end of the book that he's a Jew). And the ending is practically a paeon of praise: "In the soul of the Jewish people abode as before that genius for righteousness which wrote the Bible . . . It had been Europe only that, like Circe, had bewitched them into bestial shapes, . . . medieval Jews, for example, having been debarred from every pursuit save commerce." And so on, with a rhapsodic description of the earthly paradise created by the Jews in Palestine, a model for the rest of the world. "The mission of 'unbelieving' Israel was to convert Christendom to Christianity: and this he did."

And does Sam really believe that Shiel's vision of a world run by "pure application of science and reason" was achieved in the hysterical, myth-centered emotional debauch of Nazi Germany?

Shiel did have serious faults, as a writer and as a thinker, but he was a wizard with words and a master story-teller. And his faults are not those charged by Sam.

Incidentally, the immortal woman of *This Above All* can be identified easily, and is not Salome, See Chapter 5 of St. Mark's gospel.

Despite the above, I think Sam's series as a whole is superb, and by all means must be issued in book form.

Paul Spencer
37 Nagle Avenue
New York 40, N. Y.

● *We've asked Sam Moskowitz to defend himself, and here is his reply:*

It is at once a pleasure and a bit distressing to reply to the letter by Paul Spencer regarding my article on M. P. Shiel. A pleasure since Paul is a friend through science fiction of more than twenty

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years; distressing because one does not like to take issue with a friend.

Paul is quite right about points 1 and 2. Shiel's biographer and literary executor is John Gawsworth. The name of the detective in *The Pale Ape* is Cummings King Monk. Lest readers consider those points picayune, the correction is welcomed by me since I am readying the articles for submission to a book publisher and even a small error is painful. Ditto, point 4.

On point 3, the hero of *The Isle of Lies* is trained by his father on a lonely island, away from all influence of civilization, to have extraordinary analytical ability and an almost infallible memory. The boy forgets all his training and goes panting after the first woman he sees whom he discards when he spots a better looking one. Utilizing his fine powers of concentration and superb memory he climbs to governmental power and eventually is toppled by the treachery of his first passion. It is more a tale of power politics with an off-trail hero than a science fiction story.

Point 5 is the really important one in question. It is true that both the "hero" and the "villain" in *The Lord of the Sea* are Jews, but in reading the story it is difficult to determine who is the most villainous. The point that Paul builds his case around, that Hogarth does not know he is a Jew until the end of the book, is the result of careless reading on his part. *The Lord of the Sea is* 320 pages long and the hero Hogarth is told that he is a Jew on page *20!*

"No son are you of mine, Richard," Hogarth's Irish "father" tells him on that page. "Your mother, Rachel, who was a Londoner, served me an ill turn while we were sweethearting, hankering after another man—a Jew millionaire he was, she being a governess in his house; but, Richard, I couldn't give her up: I married her three months before you were born; and not a living creature knows, except, perhaps, one—perhaps one: a priest he was, called O'Hara. But that's how it was. Your father was a Jew, and your mother was a Jew, and you are a Jew, and in the underbottom of the old grey trunk you will find a roll of papers. Are you hearkening? And don't be ashamed of being a Jew, boy—they are the people who've got the money; and money buys land, Richard. Nor your father did not do so badly by you, either: His name was Spinoza—Sir Solomon Spinoza—"

There is also such a thing as a left-handed compliment, Paul. In the passages you quote as "a paeon of praise" it is stated: "It had

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been Europe only that, like Circe, had bewitched them into bestial shapes." That is a "paeon of praise"?

When Hogarth finally loses power and is punished, he is *not* punished for driving all the Jews out of England. That is regarded as a magnificent act and the order is *not* reversed by the government. What is his punishment? The most horrible Shiel can conceive. Hogarth is condemned to live the rest of his life among Jews teaching them: "Thou shalt not steal, Therefore Israel with some little pain attained to this."

You will find Hitler's *Mein Kampf* ringing with direct and indirect accolades to the brilliance of the Jews, but like Shiel before him, he maintained that the Jews' talents were directed in controlling the entire earth through an international conspiracy and that their eradication was the first step to a better world. At first, even mass murderer Eichman was as generous as Shiel, helping Jews to migrate out of Germany, but then he decided that his method was too slow and impractical and he utilized others.

Shiel's greatest admirer and author of the bibliography *The Works of M. P. Shiel*, A. Reynolds Morse, was fully cognizant of this monstrous flaw in Shiel's thinking and said so in his essay *The Novels of M. P. Shiel* published in the Summer, 1948 issue of ARKHAM SAMPLER. "Shiel has the same tone as the Germans," Morse said, "the same surge and push, the same sledge-hammer numbings, the same intensely emotional and impractical approach to life. The Germans, like Shiel, will never be understood unless we realize that both combine the most sentimental feelings with the most cruel realism."

The "pure application of science and reason" *as depicted by Shiel's warped mind was identical with that of Nazi Germany,* in philosophy, in spirit and in detail. It is not what you and I would consider "pure application of science and reason," but if you will take Shiel's novels and read a half-dozen consecutively, the pounding reiteration of his hate themes leaves no possibility of doubt and in the very last book written before he died, *The Young Men Are Coming,* the storm troopers are present and the same sermon preached.

Sam Moskowitz

Dear Editor:

In the August issue of *Fantastic* you asked for Utopias and won-

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dered if people still dreamed dreams. I imagine most housewives do. How else face the dishes, ironing, housecleaning? Men in mechanical repetitive jobs can, but not salesmen, administrative or clerical. Farmers can but if they are good needn't. What could be a better dream than working with good soil, growing things, even if by machinery?

But that is not my dream. First of all I don't want to be any different physically, especially not younger. But I do want more skills, to be able to ski, play golf, and tennis really well. I also want my husband to have these skills and enjoy dancing. I like our home here but I want another in the Mediterranean Sea on an island. I can see it very clearly, can even dream the floor plan. It is halfway up the hillside overlooking a bay. Many times I have tried to put it on the beach because I hate the climb back up after swimming or boating but the moment I relax it is back up the hill so I have installed a funicular. The view as you rise slowly toward the house is beautiful. We have enough money so we don't even think of it; our own plane which we both fly. We have a cruiser but seldom use it. I am never sure of what happens between times but always I arrive at the front door and step inside to peace. The Italian cook is in the kitchen to my left, sometimes I see her. My husband comes out of his study on the right and we look out through the French doors to the view across the bay. From there on we may swim, go away, receive the children, they get to grow up and change, but we don't. But that is always the beginning and there is my Utopia.

Mrs. Robert M. Thorpe
3712 N. 37th St.
Tacoma 7, Washington

● *It sounds great. How about an invitation for next summer?*

Dear Editor:

Your editorial in August *Fantastic* amazed me. I thought everyone had one or more private Utopias in the back of their mind.

Mine centers around a tropical indoor garden built back into a hill with plenty of skylights (complete independence from weather). Connected to this garden is a large cave—artificial but looking natural—sand floor, small swimming pool, fire place, modern kitchen fixed to look primitive. In short a party room for 10 to 25 people—when I want them around. I don't like crowds but do enjoy a small gathering of friends.

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Also connected is a hobby shop where I can make any kind of doo-dad: metal, wood, plastic, rock, etc.

To one side or in front—not too far away should be a small city, 1 to 2 hundred thousand and to the other side or in the rear should be a desert, wild mountains or the sea. I like to have people and things available but don't like anyone behind me.

The whole setup should be inconspicuous or almost invisible from the outside but hardy and livable on the inside.

Can you psycho-analyze yourself? I think I can. Describing a Utopia is very revealing.

C. L. Carter
2919 Cheyenne Ave.
Pueblo, Colo.

◎ *Freud would be interested in you, but I am interested in how you make a city of 200,000 people inconspicuous—even in a Utopia!*

Dear Editor:

Your editorial on Utopias was very interesting. And thought provoking. Perhaps the reason that so many people are confused as to what they would do IF, is that they are too used to being told what they must do and can do and should do. My own personal Utopia is not a place, in sense of location, but rather is specific as to opportunities. In my Utopia there would be a great deal of time, first of all, none of which would be required for eating, sleeping, etc. Instead, there would be a great many different things to do—talks, in a way, mental and physical I suppose, and like your poker players that come out of the walls, I would have people come out of the walls for purposes of discussion. We would talk at great length about art, music, great books, etc.

Tascha Lorenz
17 Washington St.
Manchester, Mass.

◎ *And if you don't like the way the discussion—or the poker game—is going, you can always pop the people back into the walls. But it's nice to have the first Utopia from a reader that takes time into consideration.*

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(Continued from page 67)

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"The power of wealth and the fear of death are a terrible combination. After fifty years of disappointment, the Institute smells blood. It will never leave the scent until it finds you—and eliminates me."

"Then what can we do?"

"I keep thinking: what kind of man was your father? And I think: he was a mammal, surely, not a reptile. Mammals don't leave the birth and survival of their children to the untender mercies of chance. He must have made some provision for protecting you, some hiding place, some help. As soon as I can travel, we'll begin a search."

The twelve-cylinder Ford chugged along the highway at less than eighty miles per hour. It was a dusty, rain-spattered ten-year-old, a farmer's car. It pulled up beside the old man plodding alongside the highway.

Unhurried, the old man with grizzled hair and beard marched forward until he reached the car. Behind the wheel was a middle-aged farmer. The old man nodded curtly as he got in. When the door slid shut behind him, he leaned against it, his head bent sullenly over his hands.

"Don't recognize the face," the farmer said cheerfully. "New around here or just passing through?"

"Passing through," the old man said in a cracked voice.

"Lots of people on the road these days," the farmer said, shaking his head soberly. "Old fellows like you, some of them. Hydroponics done 'em in, and now this new fisheries stuff, farming the sea, they say—why a few more years and a man won't hardly be able to pay his medical bills with what he can grub out of the dirt. Where'd you say you was from?"

"Didn't say."

The farmer shrugged and turned his attention to the road.

Ten minutes later the Ford passed the same spot. It was going in the opposite direction. On a crossover, it turned left and pulled to a stop. The farmer had disappeared. The old man was driving.

A girl, her hair so blond it was almost colorless, stepped from behind a clump of trees and ran quickly to the car. Before she had settled herself, the car began to move. As she turned toward the old man, the speedometer stood at 120.

"Why did you change plans?" Barbara asked. "You told me to wait an hour, hitch a ride, and we would meet in Joplin."

"That was the smart way," Sibert said, "but I couldn't do it. I

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couldn't let you get that far away from me."

He glanced at his face in the rear view mirror and nodded. The beard and the shoe blacking had changed his appearance drastically. The illness had left his face drawn and hollow. He looked old. With his training, he walked old and talked old. He almost felt old.

Barbara's frown faded in spite of her. "What did you do with the farmer?"

Sibert glanced at her quickly. With even less effort, she had been changed more. It was amazing what the old peroxide had done for her. The blondness changed her whole face. The contrast with her dark eyes was striking. Sibert felt his pulse stir.

"I knocked him out and left him behind some bushes. He'll be all right. He'll come to and get help."

"If we were going together, we might as well have taken the Cadillac."

"They've connected it with us by now, and that car could be spotted by a helicopter ten miles away. At this stage of the search, the area is blocked off in sectors. As long as we stayed still, we were safe until they started nets through. But as soon as we move we start attracting attention, setting off alarms, coming under surveillance."

Barbara looked down at her hands, clasped in her lap. "I don't like this business—shooting and stealing and slugging. . . ."

"Bobs!" Sibert said sharply. "Look at me!" Her eyes swung over; he held them. "Who does? But it's something you can't escape. It's the times we live in. It's you. You attract violence. You're the princess, remember, and you're heir to the greatest fortune on Earth—life eternal. Wherever you go, men will fight for you, lie for you, kill for you."

"I never asked for that."

"You got it as a gift at conception, life. Just as the rest of us inherited death as our portion. There's nothing you can do, nothing anyone can do."

Then there was silence.

Sibert slowed the car as they approached Joplin. "Much as I dislike it, now our only chance is to split up. They'll be looking for two people together, probably by now a man and a woman. Get out here. Catch a taxi to the airport and get a ticket on the first plane to Washington—"

"Why Washington?" she asked quickly.

"No time to explain now. Trust me. I'll try to be on the same plane. Don't recognize me or speak to me. If I'm on the plane or not, take a room in Washington at the airport motel under the same name you use for

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the ticket—Maria Cassatta, say. You can pass for Italian. If I don't show up within twenty-four hours, forget me. You'll be on your own."

Silently she climbed out of the car. It moved away. Sibert didn't look back.

The old man hobbled toward the impatient transport as fast as his ancient arteries would let him go. As soon as he had climbed aboard, the jet taxied toward the end of the runway. Two minutes later it was in the air.

Settled in his seat, Sibert glanced around with doddering curiousity. As he spotted Barbara toward the back, he suppressed a sigh of relief. Her eyes met his without changing expression and returned to the paper she was reading.

For the rest of the trip, Sibert didn't look back. She couldn't get off.

Although he had spotted nobody at the Joplin airport, he was morally certain that watchers had been there. As he tottered off the plane at Washington, he was equally unsuccessful in identifying any Institute men.

He settled himself with a sigh on a bench from which he could see both the motel office and the airport waiting room. He saw Barbara register and be escorted to a distant cabin. After half an hour there had been no one who loitered, no one who seemed to be watching. . . .

He shuffled up to the cabin door and knocked. Silently Barbara let him in. As soon as the door closed behind him, he straightened his bent back and caught her in his arms. "We made it," he said gleefully.

She was stiff and unresponsive. "Did we?"

"Of course we did. What's the matter with you?"

She pushed him away and picked up a newspaper from the table beside her. It was a Joplin paper. The headline said:

LOCAL MAN MURDERED
BESIDE OLD TOLLWAY

"You lied to me," she said without inflection.

He nodded slowly, watching her face, gauging the depth of her disillusion.

"Why did you kill him?"

"It was the safe way. I told you how it would be. I couldn't take the chance he'd raise an alarm before we got away."

"Yes, you told me."

"What I did—it was for you."

"Was it?" She closed her eyes and opened them wearily. "I suppose it was. Tell me—I want to know now—why did we come to Washington?"

Sibert shrugged helplessly. "A wild guess, a hunch, an intuition. I tried to put myself in Cartwright's place. He couldn't

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have his kids watched; he couldn't even keep in touch with them or let them know what they really were. Anything unusual would show up in the Institute's files or computers, would bring down the full resources of the Institute's search upon the very persons Cartwright was trying to shield."

"What has that got to do with Washington?"

"Cartwright's problem, then, was identical with the Institute's problem: to locate his kids, who were scattered all over the United States. He had to establish his headquarters where he could keep track of nationwide phenomena: Washington. But he had no organization; the very act of organizing would alert the Institute. He had few people he could trust—one man, perhaps, surely no more than two. Where could he place one man to do what must be done? There's only one place where one man could be effective: inside the Institute itself. As long as the Institute doesn't locate any one of Cartwright's children, the kids are reasonably safe. But if the Institute finds one of them—then Cartwright's agent can act."

Barbara nodded slowly. "It sounds logical. What are you going to do?"

"Get in touch with the agent—whoever he is. I'm going to smoke him out, and you're the smokescreen. I'll report in to the Institute as I promised, and I'll offer to sell you—for a price. The agent will hear about it; he must be in a position where he'll hear things. And he'll get in touch with me.

"Meanwhile, as soon as I leave, check out. Get a room somewhere else—in a private home, if possible. Use another name. No, don't tell me what it is. What I don't know, Locke can't force out of me. When I want to get in touch with you, I'll put a personal in the paper. I'll address it to Marie, not Maria. That will be our signal."

"Why all the precautions?"

Sibert smiled grimly. "From now on, you're my insurance. As long as you're free, they won't dare kill me."

As soon as the taxi pulled to a stop in front of the monolith, Sibert was seized. From the car behind, four men poured out, guns in their hands. Four more came through the monolith entrance.

They went over him thoroughly, swiftly, and found the tiny automatic. They took him directly to Locke's office through a subterranean passage Sibert had never suspected.

Only Sanders, the file clerk, and Liz, Locke's secretary, were in the outer office as they passed through. They did not look at

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him; it was as if he did not exist.

Locke was unchanged, but the office was different. One corner was hidden behind an impenetrable barrier of blazing light. Wordlessly, Locke waved his men out.

Sibert straightened his shoulders and smoothed down his rumpled coat. He peered futilely into the hidden corner.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"To you it doesn't matter," Locke said cheerfully. He looked at Sibert steadily. He smiled slowly. "So, the prodigal returns, bearded, weary, but more than welcome, eh? Aged considerably, too. Shall we kill the fatted calf?"

"Maybe."

Locke's face sobered. "What brought you back?"

"Money."

"What for?"

"Cartwright's kid."

"Have you got any proof it's Cartwright's kid?"

"As you know," Sibert said, unbuttoning his shirt. "I was shot a little over two weeks ago." He spread his shirt open. The scar in his chest was only a pink dimple. "Enough?"

Locke raised his old, hungry eyes to Sibert's face. "What do you want?"

"Security: money and a guarantee I'll stay alive to get the transfusions when I need them."

"The money is easy. How do you propose to get the other?"

"I want the Cartwright story, the whole thing," Sibert said evenly, "documents, affidavits, complete. I want it out where nobody can touch it. I want it fixed so that on the day I don't verify that I'm alive it gets released to every news outlet in the United States."

Locke nodded over it, considering. "You'd feel safe, then, wouldn't you? Anyone would. Then we'd have to keep you alive, no matter who else went without, no matter who had to die. It would make us all very uncomfortable, but we'd have no choice. If you had Cartwright's kid."

"I have."

"You had," Locke corrected gently. He touched the arm of his chair. "Bring in the girl."

Three men brought her into the office. Her blonde head was erect; her dark eyes swept the room. Locke nodded. The men left. As the door closed, out of the hidden corner of the room rolled a self-powered wheelchair. Huddled in it was the oldest man Sibert had ever seen.

The man was completely bald. His face and head were a wrinkled mass of gray flesh discolored with liver spots. Out of it, faded eyes stared fixedly like marbles dropped into decaying fungus. Saliva drooled uncon-

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trollably from the lax mouth.

The eyes stared at Barbara. In spite of her self-control, she shrank back a little.

"Not yet, Mr. Tate," Locke crooned, as if he were speaking to a small child. "She'll need a complete physical examination before we can let her give more blood. She's given a pint recently, and her health comes first. The children, you know."

Barbara looked at her future: Mr. Tate. She shuddered. When she looked at Sibert, her face was dead and white. "Why did you do it?" she asked.

"You've got it all wrong, Bobs —" he began desperately.

"No," she said without inflection, "I've finally got it all right. I couldn't let myself wonder, before, why you should fall in love with somone as plain as I am. I was still the princess in disguise; I wouldn't let myself doubt. Now I've got it straightened out."

"No, Bobs!" Sibert protested hoarsely. "I was following the plan—"

"Your plan, maybe. You changed the ending a little. You were going to sell me, really. I should never have believed that absurd story you told me at the motel. I should have known you could never believe it yourself. You're too ruthless to understand a human impulse. You've killed three people already—"

"Bobs, I swear this wasn't part of it!"

"Oh, I believe that. You were clever, but not clever enough. They win. And you lose everything. I'm sorry for you, Eddy. I loved you. You could have had immortality. But you threw it away."

Sibert's face worked ungovernably as he looked away, unable to endure the cold knowledge in her eyes. When he looked toward her again, the three men were once more beside her. They led Barbara toward the door; she did not look back.

"Put her in the apartment below," Locke said. "You know the one. It's been ready for long enough. Man every guard station; she must be watched every second. She'll try suicide. The man who lets her succeed will take a year dying."

Then she was gone. Locke turned back to Sibert. He smiled. "You can't beat the organization; you should have known that. No one can." He paused. "You told me once that you weren't a very good actor, Sibert. You were right; we picked you up at Joplin. As soon as you left the motel, we grabbed the girl. My only problem now is what to do with you."

"I've got protection," Sibert said quickly.

"That letter you wrote before you were shot?" Locke shook his

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head pityingly. "It was routine to check the mailbox after your escape."

The lips of the thing in the wheelchair moved; a thready whisper escaped into the room. Locke nodded.

"Mr. Tate says there is no problem: you must die. You saw his face. You must die, of course. The question is: how? We'd like to hand you over for murder, but you know too much.

"For now, we'll put you away. You'll have time to consider your sin. It's an old one—Adam and Eve succumbed to it, too. And it's the unforgivable one: too much knowledge."

The cell somewhere in the interminable levels beneath the monolith was bare except for the metal and canvas bunk. Sibert sat motionless on the bunk, unable to sleep, unable to stop thinking.

Somewhere he had gone wrong. And yet—he couldn't pin down any moment when he could have acted otherwise. He had to look out for himself; no one else would. He had to make the only possible deal that would give him immortality and freedom from violent death.

You can't fight organization. He and Barbara could never have escaped permanently and hidden forever. One day they would have been found and then—the end for him, and for her, her destiny, however arrived at. She was too rare a thing ever to be a person, too valuable to be more than a possession. She was something to be used.

Sure Barbara had loved him; many women had loved him. But only because he had earned them, had played upon them, had wooed them skillfully and with eternal patience.

Where had he gone wrong?

The bolt whispered in the solid steel door, the only exit from the cell. Silently, Sibert was on his feet, his body taut. The door swung toward him.

"Liz!"

She stood in the doorway, her eyes fixed on his face. He was beside her in two strides.

"I thought you were—Liz!" he said brokenly. "Am I glad to see you!"

In her hand was an automatic. She held it out. He wrapped his hand around it and around her hand. She pulled her hand free.

"Liz!" he said. "I don't know what to—"

"Don't say it!" she said. "You've used me, just as you've used every other person you ever knew. You're a cold-blooded snake and a killer. But I couldn't let them kill you. From now on it's up to you. Don't ever let me see you again or I may kill you."

She turned and walked briskly away.

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"Liz!" Sibert called after her in a whisper. "Where's the girl?"

She looked back at him, pointed a finger straight up, and was gone.

Cautiously Sibert followed her along the dark, concrete corridor. By the time he reached a ramp leading up, even her footsteps were gone. Sibert eased up one ramp. The corridor above was empty. He climbed a second ramp, puzzled by the silence.

In the second corridor a man was crumpled on the cold, concrete floor. Sibert bent over him. He was breathing heavily; there wasn't a mark on his face or head.

Violently, the corridor began to clang!

Sibert straightened instantly and ran. A few paces along the corridor, beside a window looking into a room within, a second man was stretched on the floor. Sibert didn't pause.

At the first ramp, he sprinted up again—directly into the midst of a handful of guards descending. They twisted the gun out of his hands. After a moment's discussion, two of them took him to Locke.

The office was thunder and lightning. Scenes flickered across one wall, revealing room after room of chaos and shouts and madly running men. Locke, spinning from desk to wall to phone, barked orders into the air. In the corner Mr. Tate huddled in his chair, his parchment eyelids closed over sunken eyes.

With a final, vicious gesture, Locke gripped his chair arm, and the wall went dark. With the lightning went the thunder. In the silence, he groaned. "She's gone."

"Gone?" Sibert echoed.

"Where is she?" Locke snapped. "How did you do it?"

"What makes you think I did it?"

"Somehow you got out of your cell. Somehow you knocked out five guards and got the girl away. Why you stayed behind I don't know, but you'd better start answering questions now."

Slowly Silbert shook his head. "It's hard to find the hen that lays the golden eggs," he said softly, "but it's even harder to keep her."

"Take him to the interrogation room," Locke snapped.

The guards gripped his arms tighter. The thing in the corner rolled forward; its mouth opened.

"Wait!" Locke said. The guards hesitated. "Mr. Tate is right. You're a stubborn man, Sibert, and you're our only link to the girl. We'll work with you. If necessary we'll pay your price. Meanwhile you'll be watched. You'll have no chance to escape. One thing I want to know: who helped you?"

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"Isn't there someone else missing?" Sibert asked quietly.

"Sanders," Locke growled. "It couldn't be Sanders. He's been here twenty years."

"Well?" Sibert said, shrugging. He would save Liz; she might come in handy once more.

He had lost Barbara, but he had won a reprieve. It would last as long as the patience of men who are dying, day by day, and cannot face the night.

They would not catch Barbara now. Not the girl who had snatched a mortally wounded man from among them and hidden him away and nursed him back to health, who had only been caught because that man had delivered her into their hands.

She was wiser now. She would trust no one. It was a lesson immortals should learn early.

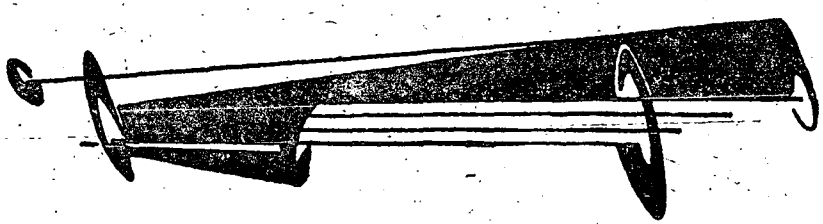
Sometime soon, Sibert thought, he would have one chance for escape; he must be ready for it. He would play their game and wait and watch, and before they learned that he'd had nothing to do with Barbara's escape, his chance would come.

Afterwards would not be pleasant. For as long as his furtive life should last, he would be a fugitive from powerful, fear-driven men, and he would be driven, himself, to a fruitless search for a lost princess disguised as an ordinary mortal—who held a priceless gift he had thrown away.

But he would not think of that now. His mouth twisted at the irony of the way things had worked out: the implausible story he had told Barbara had been true.

Sanders! For twenty long years that colorless, nearly anonymous man had shuffled through dusty papers and waited for an opportunity that might never come. Twenty years! And Cartwright had disappeared twenty years ago! The coincidence was too striking to be accidental.

He could not blame himself. Who would have dreamed that a man who might live forever would risk eternity for a child he had never seen? **THE END**



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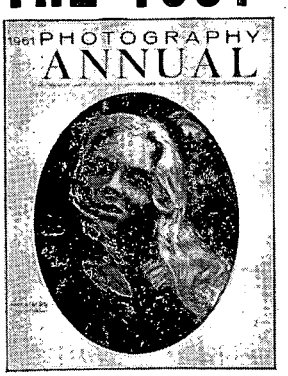

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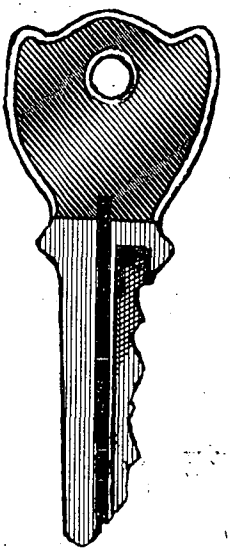

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